

Exploring Young People's Experiences on Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

Online Social Networking Sites (SNS) are a ubiquitous platform for communication and have been considered as one of the most significant changes to how young people interact today. Whilst SNS bring many opportunities, they have also been used as a tool for harassment and abuse online. The term 'cyberbullying', is most widely used to describe this phenomenon. A growing body of research demonstrates that cyberbullying has the potential to detrimentally impact young people's wellbeing. However, this impact is not universal as not all young people describe being negatively affected by cyberbullying. In spite of this, little is known about what mediates the impact of cyberbullying and how resilience is maintained in the face of such challenges. The aim of this study was to qualitatively explore young people's constructions of negative experiences on SNS and understand the influences and processes mediating such experiences.

Fourteen participants (16-18 years old) with previous negative experiences on SNS took part in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were analysed using grounded theory methodology. One core category was constructed: '(Re)building self-concept and protective shielding'. It captures the process of making sense of, responding to and resisting the effects of a negative experience online involving complex inter-relationships between the online, individual, social and political context. Central to the findings was participant's experience of an attack on their self-concept. From being targeted online, participants described harnessing control and responding in several ways (such as using technical strategies, confiding in trusted relationships, re-focusing on meaningful activities and roles) to buffer against the negative impact and (re)build their self-concept. Through this process they gained awareness and took control over their self-narrative which facilitated the development of a protective buffer against future attacks. Limitations of these findings and their implications for future research and practice are considered.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

This research pertains to young people in the UK and their experience of negative experiences on social networking sites (SNS). The aim of the introduction is to give an overview of the current literature. This chapter begins by introducing the concept of adolescence and a consideration of young people's use of SNS. Next cyberbullying as an online risk will be outlined and its impact and influencing factors will be considered. Shifting to a more critical stance, the advantages of adopting a resilience approach to cyberbullying will be discussed. It will be argued that to advance our understanding of how young people negotiate experiences of cyberbullying we must go beyond survey studies and endeavour to build new theory from young people's perspectives. Finally, the rationale, aims and research questions of the study are delineated. Appendix one details the literature search strategy.

1.2. Adolescence

The World Health Organisation (WHO; 2016) defines adolescence as the 'period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19'. It is recognised that the developmental period of adolescence can extend beyond 19 years old (WHO, 2016), leading to the recognition of another distinct period often referred to as 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2007). The term 'young people' is used to include this period, referring to those aged 16 to 24 years (WHO, 1989). In this research the term 'adolescence' and 'young people' will be used to refer to the WHO definition, unless otherwise stated.

Adolescence is characterised by biological, cognitive, social and psychological changes including puberty, and the development of abstract thought and self-concept (Carr, 2015). Although biological factors associated with adolescence can be considered mostly universal, cultural constructions of adolescence are largely

Eurocentric. Accordingly, adolescence as a discrete developmental category is arguably a social construction, which has differed across time and place (Brannen, 2002). As a cultural identity, adolescence only emerged in the west in the 1950's and many cultures, particularly those who value employment over education, understand development as passing directly from childhood to adulthood (Brannen, 2002). Therefore, it is acknowledged that the duration and defining characteristics of this period vary across time, cultures, and socioeconomic situations.

Erikson's theory of identity development (1968) presents adolescence as a critical period for the development of a personal identity. Erikson (1968) argues identity formation is in fact the primary task of adolescence; a time when identities are being explored and consolidated, particularly in relation to peers (Erikson, 1968). Central to this theory is the concept of 'identity crisis' and the search for a unique identity away from your family. Erikson (1968) argues identity formation is achieved through stages in which individuals face personal dilemmas that serve as developmental turning points (Erikson, 1968). The theory asserts that adolescents (13-18 years old) experience the group identity vs. alienation conflict; faced with pressures to find peer groups in order to belong. This is a time when peer perceptions and acceptance often dictate self-worth (Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998). This progresses to the identity vs. role confusion conflict in which young people (19-22 years old) explore independence and further consolidate a sense of self. Whilst it is incorrect to assume every young person experiences crises (Rutter, 1993), it does appear that this period presents unique challenges. However, Erikson's (1968) model of identity is often criticised for ignoring the wider context. In contrast, systemic models emphasise that identity formation is undertaken and shared by the systems around adolescents and is culturally determined (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). That said, it is widely accepted that young people will be broadening their independent experiences and forming interpersonal social relationships. In this process they are developing a sense of who they are and who they want to be, particularly in relation to ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, and different contexts will support the foregrounding of varying aspects of identity (Carr, 2015). Social media offers new social contexts, such as SNS, where young people can experiment with and explore different aspects of identity. The ubiquity of the SNS, particularly in the lives of young people, is undeniable and comes with both opportunities and risks.

1.3. Social Networking Sites

SNS are viewed as one of the most significant changes to how young people interact (Wang, Tucker & Rihll, 2011). Essentially, SNS such as Facebook, are a networked communication platform primarily promoting interpersonal contact (see Appendix two for detailed definition of SNS). Instant messengers (IM) such as Whatsapp, is a form of real-time direct based communication between individuals and groups (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). However, there are no clear-cut boundaries between different platforms. Many platforms offer multiple services and young people in the UK do not necessarily differentiate between different social media platforms (Wang *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the term social networking sites (SNS) will be used broadly to incorporate social networking sites/apps and IM. Furthermore, whilst the offline-online dichotomy may inadequately describe the hybrid experience of many young people, it seems to be a useful way to distinguish the two different mediated communications, without implying that the virtual is not real (Jurgenson, 2012). Thus, 'offline' communication will be used to refer to face-to-face contact and 'online' to describe digital communication.

1.4. SNS Use Amongst Young People

Social media use has proliferated during the last decade as the internet has become more accessible, more platforms have developed and users spend more time online. In the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that in 2016 more than 99 percent of 16 to 24 year olds were internet users and were most likely to engage in online activities that focused on social networking (91%). The increase in smartphones has played a crucial role in the pervasiveness of the internet. Statistics show that almost all 16 to 24 year olds (97%) accessed the internet 'on the go' using a phone, 96 percent use the internet daily or almost daily (ONS, 2016) and two in five children aged 5 to 15 have a smartphone (Ofcom, 2016). Given the ever-present connectivity, it is unsurprising that young people are described as living hybrid lives (Hulme, 2009).

1.4.1. Why Do Young People 'Like' SNS? The Risks And Opportunitites

Despite, specific SNS developments, the practices and motivations for engaging in SNS appear consistent; connecting, socialising and engaging in self-expression (Boyd, 2014). These practices offer opportunities, particularly for relationship development, however, they also provide a platform for negative experiences such as online harassment. Therefore, young people are positioned to carefully negotiate between opportunities and risks online (Livingstone, 2008).

1.4.1.1. *Connecting Vs. Connectivity*

Adolescents' primary use of SNS is to connect and share content with one another; spending more time engaging in social activity online than any other age group (Boyd, 2014). Young people particularly report that SNS enable them to manage, re-construct and strengthen existing relationships (Edwards & Wang, 2016). This is unsurprising given the importance of gaining and maintaining relationships during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). Through SNS the number of relationships in which individuals can participate, the frequency of contact, and the intensity are changing. Young people are increasingly relying on SNS for inclusion in their existing peer groups. However, some have described it as more of a "public display of their connection" (Boyd, 2007, pg.213). It is argued that the move towards "platformed" sociality, has created a shift from participatory connectedness to a culture of connectivity; a mere state of being connected (Dijck, 2013). Dijck (2013) infers that connectivity derives from neoliberal principles, manifested in pressure both from peers and from technologies to expand through competition and gain power through expansion of alliances. Features such as 'following' have become social values endorsing connectivity and have effects on cultural practices. Considering the basic principles of conformity (Asch & Guetzkow, 1951), if everyone we know is on online engaging in similar practices, then it is very difficult to avoid such normative social influences.

Research has also shown that young people on SNS engage in various manners of social comparisons and competition. This ranges from the number of friends on SNS as a cue for popularity, to comparing their lives to others often reporting that this

results in feelings of jealousy or dissatisfaction (Fox & Moreland, 2015). Popularity, social comparisons and connectivity are firmly rooted in a cultural ideology that values hierarchy and competition, which are further amplified online. As the powerful cultural, social and political dimensions of offline life shift online, Chapman and Buchanan (2012) argue that an increased usage of digital technologies may be something that young people have little choice in.

1.4.1.2. Self-presentation and identity

Livingstone (2008) highlights the potential role of SNS in facilitating identity formation. She explains that SNS can represent 'their' space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance with opportunities to "to construct, experiment with, and present a reflexive projection of the self in a social context" (p. 396). However, Willis (2003) highlights that whilst the online context may afford young people a new context for identity formation, simultaneously it is "also about [the] putative, comparative, and hierarchical social placing of [that] identity" (p. 407). Arguably, there is no period in which peer evaluations are likely to affect self-esteem and wellbeing more than in adolescence (Harter, 1999). On SNS, interpersonal feedback is often publicly available, such public evaluations are particularly likely to affect self-esteem. SNS can enhance self-esteem through positive feedback, but equally negative feedback has been associated with decreased self-esteem and overall wellbeing (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Furthermore, the shaping of an online identity and its evaluation is intertwined with and subject to the same marginalising and discriminating discourses that exist offline (Pegrum, 2009). Together with anonymity and the lack of embodiment in online communication, SNS may actually de-personalise our interactions giving rise to discriminative and de-humanising behaviours (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012). Suler (2004) argues that society is experiencing what has been described as online disinhibition; whereby we do and say things on the internet that we would not do in a face-to-face environment. One example of online behaviours that can be disinhibited online is harassment and abuse. In UK literature the term cyberbullying is most commonly used to refer to this phenomenon and given the rise of SNS use among young people, such sites act as primary venues for victimisation (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014).

1.5. Cyberbullying

1.5.1. What Is Cyberbullying?

There is little consensus about how to conceptualise and label online harassment and abuse. Cyberbullying is most commonly conceptualised as: “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008, p. 376).

This definition assumes that cyberbullying shares the same core criterion as traditional bullying, which are; intent to cause harm, power imbalance between victim(s) and bully(ies) and the repetition of behaviours across time (Olweus, 1993) but the venue for the harassment is different (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009). Arguably, it is exactly this difference which means these criteria are not easily translated online.

Firstly, the potential for abusive or humiliating content to be disseminated to much larger audiences complicates the parameters of what constitutes as repetition and who is held accountable (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). Bystanders take a central role in cyber-based abuse through their viewing, ‘sharing’, and ‘liking’ of content. Thus a single act by one perpetrator may be repeated, and experienced several times by the victim. In a sample of 70 European 12 to 18 years old students using focus groups, Nocentini and colleagues (2010) found that participants used terms such as “mass bullying” to illustrate repetition of bullying as a result of dissemination. Research also indicates that young people consider behaviours as cyberbullying based on a single occurrence. This is because the publicity of the act performs a similar function to repetition or because the act is particularly severe that it does not need to be repeated (Nocentini *et al.*, 2010; Dredge, Gleeson & de la Piedad Garcia, 2014). Therefore, the nature of the cyber-context and the interface between the online and offline context can lead to multiple numbers of victimisations with or without the contribution of the original perpetrator (Dooley *et al.*, 2009). Owing to the mixed findings, the repetition criterion is perhaps limited in defining what does or does not constitute as cyberbullying.

The second controversial definitional issue is power imbalance. A power imbalance in traditional bullying is typically conceptualised as physical strength, age, popularity, or the number of perpetrators, essentially making it more difficult for the individual to defend him/herself (Smith, 2011). Transferring these characteristics directly to cyberspace is complicated. Some research has understood power imbalance in cyberspace as superior technological skills that a perpetrator may have over a victim, but there seems to be little evidence to support this (Dooley *et al.*, 2009; Grigg, 2010; Nocentini *et al.*, 2010). Instead research has highlighted that cyberspace features that permit anonymity of the perpetrators, allow for the dissemination to large audiences, enable access the victim anywhere and at any time, and increase the perpetrators control over uploading and removal of material in cyberspace can lead to a power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012; Langos, 2012). This highlights that power imbalance can be mediated by an interaction between the perpetrators and the medium rather than the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, the latter relationship being central in traditional bullying.

The final criterion based on the traditional bullying definition is the intention to cause harm. As intentionality is the main characteristics of all aggressive acts (Berkowitz, 1993) it is included in almost all definitions of cyberbullying (Dooley *et al.*, 2009). Young people report that a perpetrator must intend to cause harm to constitute the behaviour as cyberbullying rather than just a joke, however, due to the lack of social cues online establishing intent can be difficult (Nocentini *et al.*, 2010, Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009; Menensini & Nocentini, 2009). Young people report using the repetition criterion to differentiate between intentional and non-intentional acts (Nocentini *et al.*, 2010; Langos, 2012). Young people also report interpreting an experience as a form of cyberbullying regardless of the perpetrators intent as unintentional acts can still have a harmful effect (Nocentini *et al.*, Menesini *et al.*, 2012; Dredge *et al.*, 2014). These findings suggest that the impact of the experience may be an important criterion in its own right, which is not included in the current conceptualisation of cyberbullying (Dredge *et al.*, 2014).

In attempting to fit behaviour into the preconceived conceptual framework of traditional bullying, researchers may be overlooking important information as to how

young people experience cyberbullying and in turn privileging a top-down approach to understanding the phenomena. Research on the impact of providing a definition on prevalence rates has drawn attention to possible incompatibility between the academic understandings of cyberbullying and bullying and young people's perception. Corcoran and McGuckin (2014) found that when using a survey with students (12 to 19 years old), to measure cyberbullying victimisation, the survey that did not include the word cyberbullying or its definition yielded significantly higher prevalence rates compared to the survey presenting the term and its definition. One explanation for these findings is that there is in fact a discrepancy between how young people and researchers define cyberbullying. Another possible explanation is that the word and definition of cyberbullying may carry a stigma that young people may not want to be associated with (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009). Both explanations raise important questions; firstly, is our understanding of cyberbullying in line with how young people understand their experience? Secondly, is the term useful? Grigg (2010) studied the perception of terminologies from the viewpoint of students. Participants reported that the term cyberbullying was not broad enough to describe the range of negative acts that occur online.

In summary, the fundamental characteristics of cyberbullying and how it differs from traditional bullying remains unclear (Tokunaga, 2010). In practice, many studies do not rely on the inclusion of the criteria named and therefore the literature is saturated with the term cyberbullying yet measuring different constructions of it (Bauman, Underwood & Card, 2013). Therefore, the debate as to whether the term accurately reflects this myriad of negative experiences online is ongoing (Kowalski, *et al.*, 2012). Tokunaga (2010) describes lack of conceptual consensus as "the most pervasive methodological drawback in cyberbullying research" (p.283) as it impedes the development of reliable and valid measures and in turn evidence based interventions. Some researchers have suggested the term cyber-aggression as a useful alternative (Bauman *et al.*, 2013). Corcoran, Guckin and Prentice (2015) refer to cyber aggression as any behaviour enacted through the use of information and communication technologies that is intended to harm another person(s) that the target person(s) wants to avoid. Intent to cause harm is seen to be best judged on the basis of how a reasonable person would assess intent. Therefore, this term only refers to the intentionality criterion.

Given the inconclusiveness, there is a need to consult SNS users and self-identified victims to understand their experience and conceptualisation of online abuse (Dredge *et al.*, 2014). Although, the term cyberbullying is not free from problematic assumptions, this thesis will tentatively adopt the term and operational definition, as it is widely recognised and used in the literature. However, it is acknowledged that much of the literature uses the term loosely; not adhering strictly to the current definition (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Therefore, this literature review will also be reviewing cyber-aggression. Furthermore, the term 'victim' will be used to refer to a person who has experienced cyberbullying but with the appreciation that young people may not identify with this label.

1.5.2. Types of cyberbullying

The most comprehensive categorisation of cyberbullying acts is provided by Willard (2006), and includes flaming, harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery and exclusion. Definitions for each act can be found in Appendix three. 'Sexting' is perhaps the most recent online risk to gain public attention. Definitions regard it as the digital extension of coercion to provide sexual message or to conform to particular sexual expectations or/and the act of distributing nude pictures without consent (Albury, Evers, Byron, & Crawford, 2013). However, Livingstone and Smith (2014) suggest that young people and adults may disagree on where to draw the line between acceptable sexual exploration and inappropriate or abusive messaging. In fact, to some extent this can be said about many types of cyberbullying. Young people describe a host of different practices that might be identified as cyberbullying by adults yet young people have different conceptualisations of such practices and use different language (Boyd, 2014). The diversity of cyberbullying has been researched in terms of the main media technology used, more specific ways of using technology (e.g. SNS) and by type of behaviours. This literature review includes research across all these factors.

1.6. Cyberbullying Victimization

1.6.1. Prevalence

A European study was conducted between 2009 and 2011 with 25,000 9 to 16 year olds in 25 European countries (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). Notwithstanding considerable cross-nation variation, it found that being cyber-bullied was ranked as the fourth risk experienced online, affecting one in five adolescents online, along with receiving unwanted sexual comments which was experienced by as many as one in four adolescents in the UK. More recently in the UK, the charity Ditch the Label 2016's UK Annual Bullying Survey included 3,023 respondents and estimated that 6 in 10 young people (13-20 years old) are victims of cyberbullying. Prevalence rates of cyberbullying or cyber-aggression across research varies and this can be attributed to factors including frequency, time reference period, the cyberbullying definitions used, the emphasis on particular media or bullying practices, and the time and context of the survey administration (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). In a meta-analysis, Kowalski and colleagues (2014) report that in general prevalence estimates for cyberbullying victimisation for young people ranged between 10 and 40 percent, peaking between the ages of 13 to 15 years old. Researchers argue that in spite of the variance in prevalence across studies, cyberbullying remains a serious online risk (Smith, 2011; Tokunaga, 2010).

It is important to note that much of the cyberbullying research has been conducted in Western countries (Barlett *et al.*, 2014), where there is, at large, stable economies and the concept of adolescence as a distinct developmental phase is widely accepted. Although, there are developments in research globally, with some suggesting that the concept of cyberbullying is widespread, the question remains of how similar are the experiences of cyberbullying among young people in different countries and cultures (Barlett *et al.*, 2014). Even within European countries data shows large variation in prevalence and differences in conceptualisation of the cyberbullying (Genta *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, in this literature review research will be drawn from European, North American and Australian research, which is considered appropriate as this study is carried out in the UK.

1.6.2. The Impact of Cyberbullying Victimization

Research on the impact of traditional bullying has consistently indicated that victimisation is associated with both short and long term effects that can persist into adulthood. Long term effects include severe symptoms of mental health problems such as self-harm and 'psychosis'¹ (Arseneault, Bowes & Shakoor, 2009). However, the relative impact of traditional and cyberbullying are likely to be affected by the differences between them. Therefore, understanding the specific impact of cyberbullying is necessary to inform interventions.

Cyberbullying is associated with a range of affective, psychosocial and behavioural difficulties. Studies have linked cyberbullying victimisation to 'anxiety' (Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, & Storch, 2009) and 'depression' (Didden *et al.*, 2009; Perren *et al.*, 2010). Victims typically report emotional responses such as stress, fear, embarrassment, frustration, annoyance, sadness, hopelessness and self-blame (Didden *et al.*, 2009; Ortega, Elipe & Calmaestra, 2009; Li & Beran, 2005). Price and Dalglish (2010) found that cyberbullying victimisation most commonly impacted upon self-esteem (78%), poor self-evaluation (70%) and exclusion from friendships. Similar findings are documented throughout the literature and the impact on young people's identities and peer relationship is often reported as severe (Ortega, Elipe & Monks, 2012). This is unsurprising given that online platforms are most commonly used for self-expression, seeking positive self-validation and friendships (Boyd, 2014). During a critical period of identity development, which is largely dependent on peer-acceptance and perception, the rupture to one's self esteem and self-concept is likely to have a significant effect (Leary *et al.*, 1998).

The raised awareness of cyberbullying has been underscored by the media coverage of young people committing suicide following cyberbullying experiences (Pendergrass & Wright, 2014). In a meta-analysis, Kowalski and colleagues (2014) found that the strongest associations with cyberbullying victimisation were stress and suicidal ideation. Hinduja and Patchin (2008) reported cyberbullying victims (10-16

¹ Psychiatric diagnoses are in quotation marks to indicate the limitations of the diagnostic system (e.g. Boyle, 2002)

year olds in North America) were 1.9 times more likely to attempt suicide than those who were not cyberbullying victims.

Somatic symptoms such as headaches, poor appetite and sleep disturbances have also been reported. Also, associations between victimisation and increased substance misuse, school absenteeism and decrements in academic performance has been found (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014).

Victims often report impact in many areas of functioning (Dredge *et al.*, 2014; Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). Few studies have investigated the long-term effects of cyberbullying. However, one recent longitudinal study in the UK carried out with 2,480, 12-13 year olds students, found victims and bully/victims were significantly more likely to report depressive symptoms, social anxiety symptoms and below average well-being at the one year follow up, in comparison to their uninvolved peers. These associations were sustained after adjusting for baseline mental health (Fahy *et al.*, 2016).

Whilst the negative impact of cyberbullying is well documented, the research available must be interpreted with caution. Studies investigating the consequences of cyberbullying victimisation have relied on correlational and cross-sectional data, therefore, yielding indefinite conclusions about causation. Studies have also typically used hypothetical victimisation scenarios rather than measurement of the impact of real life experiences thus limiting the external validity of the results (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014).

However, beyond academic research the negative impact of cyberbullying is identified by parents, teachers and clinicians as a growing concern (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013). In the UK over the last five years, ChildLine counselling about cyberbullying has increased by 88 percent (NSPCC, 2015). In 2015, bullying/online bullying was one of the top four reasons people contacted ChildLine and nearly a third (31%) of counselling sessions were with young people

experiencing bullying on SNS (NSPCC, 2015). That said, it is important to note that research also shows that not all young people describe being negatively affected by cyberbullying (e.g. Ortega *et al.*, 2009; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Burgess-Proctor, Patchin & Hinduja, 2009; Dredge *et al.*, 2014). These mixed findings highlight that there are likely to be factors mediating the impact of victimisation. In a review Tokunaga (2010), summarised that victimisation impact can fluctuate between severe impact and no impact, or can fall on a continuum in between. Yet understanding the factors that influence these varied responses to similar victimisation experiences is under-researched (Dredge *et al.*, 2013) and this is crucial information needed to inform effective preventative interventions. Thus, the factors that mediate the impact of victimisation and support young people to overcome the challenges faced online, will now be considered.

1.7. Mediating The Impact of Cyberbullying

At present, the literature has focused on how young people cope with cyberbullying or considers the risk and protective factors for cyberbullying victimisation, rather than factors that impact victimisation severity. These aspects of cyberbullying victimisation will inevitably interrelate. However, research has been criticised for a limited theoretical understanding of the relationship between mediating factors and victimisation outcomes and a lack of consideration of contextual factors (Tokunaga, 2010). This is particularly evident in the few qualitative studies available which predominately focus on risk and protective factors for cyberbullying victimisation without offering a theoretical explanation of how these factors may link. This study differs from previous qualitative research in that it aims to move towards a theoretical and a process based approach to understanding how young people face and overcome such issues rather than merely identifying risk and protective factors.

To date, social ecological theories have been one approach used in attempts to theoretically conceptualise traditional (face to face) forms of bullying (e.g. Espelage, 2011). From a social ecological perspective bullying and its related risk and outcomes is understood as being established, perpetuated and impacted by the complex interplay and interaction between individuals and the context that they live

in including their family, peers or peer groups and wider contextual factors (Espelage & Swearer, 2011). The Bronfenbrenner ecological theory is perhaps the most well-known social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It posits a number of overlapping systems to illustrate the potential impact of both immediate and indirect factors on human behaviour. At the microsystem, the most immediate level, an individual has direct interactions with their immediate environment including home, family, school and peer groups which influence and reinforce particular attitudes and behaviours. These environments also impact on a child's development by interacting with each other at the level known as the mesosystem. The exosystem, is a more distant system, it includes institutions of society that indirectly affect a child's development such as a parent's workplace and the relationship between home life and a parent's workplace. The macrosystem comprises the broader societal, cultural, political and economic ideologies that shape the institutions and social norms which influence the child's environment. The final system is known as the chronosystem which encompasses the dimension of time; changes or consistency over time, not only in the characteristic of the person but also of the environment and the period in time which that person lives. The emphasis here is that experiences need to be framed within the given time and historical context.

The Bronfenbrenner ecological theory has been particularly useful in understanding children's development as it integrates the multiple interacting influences on a child within the context of the systems that they are embedded in. This has proven to be beneficial in providing an insight into all the factors that play a role in a child's development. However, Bronfenbrenner does not discuss the factors explicitly as such, rather he presents a theoretical and analytical framework. This has led to the model being criticised for lacking detailed explanation of the mechanisms for development. The model has also been criticised for overlooking the ability and power of individuals to shape their context and thus influence their development, which essentially limits the applicability for change at an individual level (e.g. Paquette & Ryan, 2001). In response to this, Bronfenbrenner extended the properties of the model into the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This model involves four principal components; Process, Person, Contexts and Time and the dynamic, interactive relationships among them. Process encompasses particular forms of interaction between

individuals and the environment, called proximal processes, which operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development. However, the power of such processes to influence development is seen to vary considerably as a function of the characteristics of the developing Person, of the immediate and more remote environmental Contexts, and the Time periods, in which the proximal processes take place.

From the social ecological perspective researchers (e.g. Espelage & Swearer, 2011) have demonstrated that risk and protective factors at each level of context have an impact on the likelihood of bullying involvement. However, to date there has been limited research available to understand both the interrelating individual and social contexts, and to identify the process of factors and consequences associated with cyberbullying behaviours (Smith *et al.* 2008). To realistically address and understand cyberbullying behaviour an ecological framework would need to target the ecological, cognitive and psychosocial factors that can mediate at the individual, family, peer, online, community and wider political level, as well as recognising the seamless online/offline social context of young people's lives. By adopting the social ecological theory approach, a review of the current literature referring to possible mediating factors of cyberbullying victimisation in terms of its occurrence, impact and how young people cope will now be considered across all levels of context.

1.7.1. Individual factors

1.7.1.1. *Demographic*

No definitive conclusions can be drawn from a meta-synthesis of research related to the relationship between demographic attributes and cyberbullying victimisation (Tokunaga, 2010). That said, some research suggests that girls are more likely to experience certain forms of cyberbullying (e.g. gender-based harassment and exclusion) and report their reputation being affected more by the cyberbullying (Kowalksi *et al.*, 2014). Also, girls are more likely to disclose and seek support than boys, which is a key coping resource (Kowalksi *et al.*, 2014). Research has also shown that belonging to a discriminated against group or having a disability, were associated with cyberbullying victimisation (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, &

Ólafsson, 2011). This suggests that markers of difference may influence the risk of experiencing cyberbullying. However, little is known about how demographic attributes may moderate the impact of such experiences.

1.7.1.2. Coping strategies

'Coping' can be defined as the deployment of skills and personal or external resources to manage problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive model of coping distinguishes between emotional-focused; strategies where individuals manage distress by seeking social support or avoiding problems, and problem-focused coping; which involves pro-active attempts to solve problems deemed responsive to change. Adolescents typically respond by using technical solutions online which include avoidant or problem focused strategies such as blocking the message or person, reporting the incident, or strategies such as staying offline for a period of time (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk & Solomon, 2010; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Digital literacy is important to make use of these strategies (Vandoninck, d'Haenens, & Segers, 2012). As with traditional bullying, researchers have also found that cyberbullying victims use strategies such as seeking social support, confronting or ignoring the situation in response to cyberbullying (Tokunaga, 2010). Considering the limited studies examining the effectiveness of these strategies, it seems the impact of cyberbullying can be mitigated by coping strategies either through reducing immediate stress or by preventing long-term consequences (Machmutow, Perren, Sticca & Alsaker, 2012). Völlink, Bolman, Dehue, and Jacobs (2013) argued that victims who appraise cyberbullying as something that cannot be changed engage in more unhelpful internalising emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g. self-blame). However, an emphasis on the emotion vs. problem focused dichotomous for coping has been criticised, as many coping strategies do not fit neatly or exclusively into these categories. As an alternative, Parris and colleagues (2012) suggested broader categories including 'reactive' coping, 'preventive' and 'no way to prevent cyberbullying'. Furthermore, an over-reliance on cognitive models of coping, which emphasise an individual's cognitive appraisals and personal responses as determinants of coping, overlooks the influence of developmental and wider contextual factors (Smith, 2011).

1.7.1.3. *Self-esteem and self-efficacy*

Research shows that cyberbullying can affect self-esteem, which is of concern as lower self-esteem is associated with increased risk in the online environment (Vandoninck et al., 2012). Leary and colleagues (1998) consider self-esteem to be an internal representation of social acceptance and rejection, self-worth and a psychological gauge monitoring the degree to which a person is included by others. Self-esteem and related concepts such as a sense of purpose and belonging are identified as key protective factors to overcome adversity (Garmezy, 1985). Using previously collected qualitative data as case studies, Papatraianoua, Levine, West (2014) suggest that young people draw on these qualities to mitigate the negative impact of cyberbullying.

Within social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy describes confidence in the ability to exert control over one's situation (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999). Raskauskas and Huyah (2015) found that if a victim believes they do not have the capacity to employ a coping strategy (i.e. self-efficacy) then it is unlikely to be used when responding to cyberbullying. However, drawing on ideas from power-mapping (Hagan & Smail, 1997), accounting merely for the individual's ability to take charge of their own conduct, whether through appraisals or attitudes, is inadequate. Instead attention to the actual access to resources and operation of social power beyond the individual is warranted. In agreement, Prilleltensky, Nelson and Peirson (2001), assert that self-efficacy but only in addition to personal control can serve as a protective factor for young people facing adversity.

1.7.1.4. *Perception & attitudes towards cyberbullying*

Of the few qualitative studies available, findings suggest that dismissive attitudes towards cyberbullying may serve as a protective factor or coping mechanism. Young people who referred to their ability to joke about their experience, interpreted the situation as one not worth getting upset about and dismissed cyberbullies as pathetic (Dredge et al., 2014; Parris et al., 2012). Young people also expressed beliefs about the universality of cyberbullying, viewing it as a normative, routine and expected experience online (Dredge et al., 2014; Bryce & Fraser, 2013). Dredge and colleagues (2014) suggest that such attitudes seemed to safeguard the victims from

being severely affected by their experiences, but further exploration on this topic is needed. Furthermore, the relative impact of cyberbullying will also depend on the nature of victimisation and technology developments, for instance, adopting a blasé attitude to a nasty email may be easier than dismissing degrading videos (Smith *et al.*, 2008).

1.7.2. Family And Peer Influences

1.7.2.1. *Social support*

Having supportive family and peer relationships is central to reducing the impact of cyberbullying (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011). However, research shows that many victims of cyberbullying are reluctant to disclose their experience, particularly to adults (Slonje *et al.*, 2013; Tokunaga, 2010). Many reasons for this have been suggested including young people reporting that adults will not understand or would not be able to reduce the cyberbullying (Sleglova & Cerna, 2011). Young people also fear that online use will be restricted or terminated (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009), they report concerns that others will overreact and that they feel that they should deal with it on their own (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Therefore, whilst we know that social support is a key protective factor, it is important to identify what makes seeking support appealing, useful and how different forms of social support might mitigate the impact of cyberbullying (Nixon, 2014).

1.7.2.2. *Role of bystanders*

Bystanders are other users of a site that witness the victimisation. Given the large audiences online the number of bystanders can be substantial. Dredge and colleagues (2014) identified bystander's action or inaction as an important mediating factor for impact severity. Young people reported that the impact of victimisation is worse as more people get involved in the harassment and when support from bystanders was not forthcoming. Reviews indicates that small proportions of bystanders intervene to help victims. Young people report a number of reasons for this, for example, they have claimed that they believed that the cyberbullying was not serious in nature and unlikely to cause harm to the target, whilst others report that they viewed the victim as responsible (Mishna *et al.*, 2010) and some fear that they

would become the target of the abuse (Kowalski et al., 2012). It is not merely the action or inaction of the bystander that is therefore important, but also their perceptions of responsibility and cyberbullying itself. Ajzen's (1991) theory of reasoned action implies that the influence of others can be mediated through beliefs about how others think one should behave in particular situations. For instance, if bystanders were expected by their peers to support victims, bullying may be less likely to occur. If cyberbullying is viewed as unacceptable, it is possible that the perpetrators will be less tempted to target someone, especially online because there would be more social or normative pressure of disapproval and support for the victim. However, despite disapproval of cyberbullying amongst young people, many of them are still reluctant to intervene (Dillon & Bushman, 2015). In this case, cyberbullying is afforded the opportunity to proliferate both because bystanders will most likely refrain from intervening and online the acts are less detectable by adults who may intervene (Dillon & Bushman, 2015).

1.7.3. School Context

There is recognition that a school climate is important to cyberbullying prevention as policies advocate for a whole school based approach (Espelage, Rao & Craven 2012). However, the relationship between a school climate and cyberbullying is an under-researched area. One correlational study suggests that students involved in cyberbullying had poorer perceptions of their school climate than those not involved (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Espelage and colleagues (2012) emphasise the need for a contextual approach in schools that promotes cyberbullying as unacceptable, so it is no longer condoned by peers and no longer reinforces a positive self-concept for perpetrators.

1.7.4. Online Context

Anonymity and disinhibition online can escalate the severity and duration of online harassment resulting in the impact of the cyberbullying being amplified (Bryce & Fraser, 2013). Young people perceive anonymity of the perpetrator to have more serious and negative impacts on victims including intensify emotional reaction such as fear (Sticca & Perren; 2013; Dredge *et al.*, 2014). However, studies have also found that victimisation within existing peer networks by a known perpetrator, can

equally intensify the impact, possibly because of the risk posed to their social network (Dredge *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, given the limited social and contextual cues it is also hypothesised that perpetrators may feel less empathy for their actions which can increase the intensity of the attacks (Smith, 2011). This is often associated with the theory of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999), whereby a perpetrator reframes their aggressive actions as more benign in intent and as less harmful.

Cyberbullying victimisation that occurred in front of an audience in public is often reported as the most severe form of cyberbullying. This is because young people associate such public acts with increased feelings of embarrassment and shame (Bryce & Fraser, 2013). However, Slonje and colleagues (2013) argue that publicity may create more opportunities for bystander support which may also contribute to feeling less alone.

The permanency of content online has been described as a constant reliving of the experience which maintains emotional distress (Campbell, 2005). Young people described how feelings of hopelessness and helplessness were intensified by a lack of control over content posted online (Dredge *et al.*, 2014). Others report that the 24hr accessibility and 'on the go' technology culture creates a reduced sense of control and power over the situation and a sense that there is 'no safe haven' (Slonje *et al.*, 2013). In fact, being cyberbullied via mobile as opposed to a stationary device is associated with higher psychological difficulties (Görzig & Frumkin, 2013). This is important given that a lack of power and control can be detrimental to young people's resilience (Prilleltensky *et al.*, 2001).

Espelage and colleagues (2012) suggests that social norms are likely to extend or be re-constructed for SNS amongst young people. Applying the social norms theory (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986) they propose that peers influence each other's involvement in behaviours such as cyberbullying, owing to the misperception of norms. This misperception stems from a discrepancy between perceived and actual behaviours which may cause young people to believe cyberbullying is more common

or normalised than it is, possibly resulting in increased perpetration, more reinforcement by bystanders and passive acceptance on the part of the victim. This raises important questions about how social norms online and offline may affect the impact of cyberbullying.

1.7.5. Wider context

1.7.5.1. *Discourse*

Walton (2005) argues that bullying is a social and political construction rooted in ideological relations of power and social oppression. He asserts that the bullying literature largely ignores the ways in which markers of differences (e.g. sexism) inform the nature and impact of bullying among young people. Ringrose and Renold (2010) examine bullying as a normative discourse, that to be positioned as a bully or victim is neither 'desirable nor powerful' (p. 582) for young people. They argue that such discourses can hide complex contextual dynamics behind cyberbullying practices and fail to examine patterns of social categories, power and aggression that permeate to the online environments. Others note how victim/bully language may impact on how young people respond to cyberbullying. For example, Nixon (2014) speculates that the 'victim' discourse often conjures up a sense of helplessness and a loss of control and therefore, those who identify themselves as a "victim" may respond differently to cyberbullying experiences compared to those who do not.

1.7.5.2. *Policies and Interventions*

Although, there is no specific law criminalising cyberbullying, prosecutions can be applied under a number of legislative provisions. It is, however, a legal requirement that schools in England have an anti-bullying policy. Smith and colleagues (2008) suggests that comprehensive anti-bullying policies are significantly related to reduction in traditional bullying, however, cyberbullying is less mentioned in these policies. Paul, Smith and Blumberg (2012) found that despite guidelines and legislation regarding cyberbullying being available at local, national and school level in the UK, the information had not filtered down to the students. The majority of adolescents in this study were unaware of safeguarding measures in place to protect

them or how to seek help, which is likely to have implications for the experience of victimisation.

1.8. A Shift Towards Resilience Online

A danger of predominantly focusing on cyberbullying victimisation is to obscure a view of young people as typically resilient when faced with adversity, and to replace it with an emphasis on vulnerability. This is not to deny the risks young people are faced with online. Young people in the UK clearly report an awareness of such risks; they describe the conflict between wanting to have an online presence and the desire to avoid risks (Betts & Spenser, 2017). However, research has largely ignored young people's experiences of resilience in favour of a focus on a 'victim' approach. This is in spite of research showing that negative outcomes are not universal. By focusing on vulnerabilities, narratives of resilience and ongoing attempts to cope can be overlooked. Furthermore, wider social-political issues can be hidden by the emphasis on the bully/victim dichotomy and prioritising of online protection (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012).

Przybylski, Mishkin, Shotbolt and Linington (2014) argue that less attention has focused on the factors that might empower young people online; to be both resilient to risks and actively pursue positive opportunities online. The construct of resilience has been understood to overlap with psychological constructs such as 'self-esteem', and 'self-efficacy' as well as ideas of power and control (Prilleltensky *et al.*, 2001). Resilience online is conceptualised as a process of learning to deal with difficult issues, sustaining psychological and physical functioning when facing risks, to adjust and feel empowered to draw on and sustain abilities (Przybylski *et al.*, 2014; Vandoninck *et al.*, 2012). Risk and resilience go hand in hand; the process of resilience online centralises on learning from negative experiences (Vandoninck *et al.*, 2012). Resilience has been delineated as both an individual trait and a dynamic process (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). Conceptualising resilience as a personal attribute is criticised for obscuring contextual factors (Luthar *et al.*, 2000). Increasingly, resilience is viewed as an ecological and contextual pathway; a relational, dynamic and interactive process underpinned by different and interrelated

factors and relationships, which fluctuate with context (Herrman *et al.*, 2011; Prilleltensky *et al.*, 2001). White (2004) adds to this by conceptualising resilience as “an emblem for a range of alternative identity conclusions as well as knowledges about life and skills of living” (p.5). In this way, coping strategies, risk and protective factors, can be viewed as salient facets of resilience but not its entirety.

In relation to resilience there has been developing interest in the potential for personal growth following difficult life experiences. The term 'posttraumatic growth' has been used to denote the positive consequences of adversity (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014). Through struggle it is argued that a resilient response can involve a transformative renewal of many aspects of one's self including self-perception, greater sense of one's strengths and awareness, re-evaluating of life priorities, identity and relationships (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014). Little is known about the concept of personal growth in children and adolescents (Meyerson, Grant, Carter & Kilmer, 2011), and particularly in relation to cyberbullying.

1.8.1. Resilience In The Face Of Cyberbullying

At large, the concept of resilience has been neglected in bullying research and even more so in cyberbullying literature (Vandoninck *et al.*, 2012). Przybylski *et al.*, (2014) carried out a national UK survey specifically on resilience to online risks including cyberbullying. Two main conclusions were made; firstly, supportive and enabling parenting has a more positive impact on resilience than parental strategies to restrict or monitor the use of the internet. Secondly, young people with improved skills in using digital technologies and higher levels of 'digital optimism'; believing the internet and digital technology benefits society, were more likely to demonstrate resilience. It is important to note that resilience in this study was conceptualised as an individual trait rather than a process. Papatraianoua, Levine and West (2014) adopted an ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) to consider resilience to cyberbullying by imposing this model on previously collected qualitative data. The study usefully draws attention to range of influential factors of resilience from microsystem individual characteristics such as self-esteem to mesosystem factors such as positive peer relationships. Nonetheless, there remains an absence of young people's perspectives of what is resilience online and how is it maintained.

1.9. Policy and Interventions

The need for guidance and interventions that address cyberbullying is well recognised. Policies such as Future in Mind (2015), Byron Review (2010) and Preventing and Tackling Bullying (Department of Education, 2014) stress the legal obligation for schools to have anti-bullying policies including an E-safety curriculum, and to take actions towards improving adult's digital skills and limiting electronic devices to help contain cyberbullying. However, Wang, Lannotti and Luk, (2012) argue that current trends in policy and educational practice, endorse increased censorship, surveillance and punishment of young people's online practices whilst down playing face-to-face interventions based on restorative relational approaches. Whilst, this intends to protect young people, they assert that such approaches risk restricting or detrimentally interfering with young people's important relationships and their meaningful sense of self-governance online. They advocate for less punitive and individualising approaches which consider the young person's perspective.

Furthermore, despite current policy and intervention efforts, a recent National Children Bureau survey on bullying, found that 70 percent of teachers felt ill-equipped to support children with mental health problems relating to bullying and cyberbullying (Livingstone & Brake, 2010). The House of Commons Health committee report (2014) calls for NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to be skilled in effectively supporting young people to cope with the challenges of online culture, particularly cyberbullying. Yet, they also report that many professionals feel "completely out of touch with, even intimidated by, social media" (pg. 88) and the issues young people face online. The report called for a pressing need to develop service provision founded on academic and practice-based evidence on how young people want to and need to be supported. It also highlights that whilst CAMHS are increasingly confronted with online risks, overstretched services have seen referral thresholds increasing and waiting lists lengthening; therefore the need for early intervention and building resilience is becoming a focus across policies. The emphasis on developing resilience is evident in policies directly addressing online risk (e.g. Byron, 2010). Whilst this is important, McMahon (2015) warns us of the danger of insinuating that we *must* be 'resilient' to online abuse,

while ignoring the unacceptability and structural causes of such abuse. McMahon's (2015) argument highlights the need to adopt a broader contextual approach, considering prevention across all levels of context.

1.10. Current Study

1.10.1. Rationale

Whilst SNS brings many opportunities, it is also exposing young people to interactions which can jeopardise their wellbeing. Adolescence is not only the peak period of involvement in cyberbullying, it is also when social media, particularly the use of SNS is at its highest (Boyd, 2014). Given the rise of SNS use among young people, such sites have become primary venues for cyberbullying victimisation (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). Research needs to keep pace with the rapid changes in social media and its interactions with contextual, cultural and societal differences (Li *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this research will focus on cyberbullying on SNS with a UK population.

Cyberbullying has been defined in many ways, with overlap across definitions but no clear consensus. The discrepancy between how young people and research defines cyberbullying has significant implications for research and intervention development (Dredge *et al.*, 2014). As inconclusiveness remains regarding definitional clarity and the terms usefulness, what is understood as cyberbullying clearly needs further investigation. Therefore, this study intends to consult SNS users and particularly those who self-identify as having negative experiences. Given the difficulties with the current conceptualisation and the exploratory nature of this study, the study will not use the term cyberbullying or cyber-aggression nor their definitions during recruitment. This is to avoid the issue of potentially excluding participants who don't conceptualise their experiences in this way and inadvertently imposing a 'victim' label. Therefore, during recruitment the term 'negative experience online' will be used. In doing this, this study intends to provide a platform for which cyberbullying can be constructed by those who may experience it, and contribute to research and interventions that are grounded in young people's experiences (Tokunaga, 2010).

Within the current research literature there has been an overreliance on cross-sectional and correlational quantitative data, meaning causal relationships are unsubstantiated. Tokunaga (2010) asserts that examining cyberbullying in this way assumes that the experience occurs in a vacuum. The literature lacks in-depth understanding from the perspective of young people regarding the relationships between cyberbullying, its impact and influential factors across all contexts. This study aims to address this gap by using an exploratory qualitative method.

With the increasing numbers of young people seeking psychological support for cyberbullying related issues and the demanding pressures on CAMHS, cyberbullying is an issue of concern that needs to be addressed within the realm of clinical psychology. That said, there is also the risk of creating a moral panic, whereby the proliferation of a cyberbully 'victim' discourse obscures the fact that research also shows large proportions of victims are not negatively affected by their experience (e.g. Ortega *et al.*, 2009; Smith *et al.*, 2008). Such findings draw attention to ways young people are able to successfully navigate negative experiences online, yet little research has investigated this further. This study intends to consult with young people to learn what hinders or helps mitigate the impact of cyberbullying and how they can maintain resilience in the face of online challenges. By doing so, this study hopes to support the development of interventions that are bottom-up, reactive as well as preventative.

Studies investigating risk and protective factors of cyberbullying have been conducted in the absence of theory. Consequently, the body of research has lacked cohesiveness (Tokunaga, 2010). Some theory has guided hypotheses that are derived, particularly in the research regarding coping with cyberbullying, but this literature largely employs cognitive models. In this way, most theoretical understanding is rooted at the micro level and overlooks the context in which cyberbullying occurs. Given the insufficient attempts made at theory building in the cyberbullying literature (Tokunaga, 2010) this study aims to develop a model to understand the ongoing contextual nature of the cyberbullying process and the influences that exert on the experience, particularly factors that perpetuate or

safeguard against the negative outcomes. Since the current effectiveness of interventions and policies is questionable (Wang *et al.*, 2012), there appears to be a pressing need for a theoretical model to contribute to the policy and clinical practice as well as research.

Lastly, cyberbullying research in the UK has predominately studied younger adolescents (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). Given this the study will focus on young people aged 16 to 18 years old. Furthermore, aiming to include a non-clinical sample, may provide more opportunity to understand how young people manage without the input of mental health services.

Exploring how young people talk about managing, negotiating and maintaining resilience in the face of negative experiences online and the factors that mediate its impact, may offer an explanation as to why the effects of cyberbullying vary. This can help identify protective factors that have not been previously considered in research. The aim of the study, is to recruit young people aged 16 to 18 years old from the general population, who self-identify as having negative experiences on SNS. Then to qualitatively explore those individual's own experiences of and perspectives of negative experiences on SNS. The aim of exploration will be to consider how participants construct their negative experiences on SNS and understand the influences and processes mediating their experiences. By synthesising this information, the study intends to develop a theoretical understanding of social processes occurring in negative experiences on SNS.

1.10.2. Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

- How do young people make sense of negative experiences online?
- What influences the impact of young people's negative experiences on SNS?
- How do young people deal with negative experiences online and what helps or hinders this process?
- How do young people maintain resilience when faced with negative experiences online?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Overview

This chapter outlines the epistemological and ontological position adopted in this study and explains how they influenced the selection of grounded theory methodology (GT) to address the research questions. A brief outline of GT is given, followed by a summary of the processes involved in this particular study.

2.2. Epistemological and Ontological Position

The study adopts a critical realist position; assuming a relativist epistemology and realist ontology. This position accepts a belief in an independent existing reality but acknowledges the subjectivity in making sense of this reality (Harper, 2011). The research accepts that cyberbullying and online experiences occur and the data collected tell us something about these experiences. However, how these experiences are understood by young people and the researcher depends on our own and wider contexts, such as the underlying influences of social-cultural and political structures on social media use (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012). Therefore, accessing these realities is mediated by social processes, which are contextually, culturally and historically bound (Willig, 2013) and do not directly mirror people's experiences of reality. Instead the way in which young people talk about their experiences online and the resulting effects are socially constructed and will organise young people's experiences. From this stance, I consider that the data cannot exist in isolation from the historical, cultural and social context. I also assume that as I am part of the world that I study, I have constructed the contexts within which the data is made meaningful. Accordingly, there is a need to explicitly consider my own positioning and contexts throughout this research, whilst recognising that my interpretation will be one of many realities. A critical realist position was adopted as it is in accordance with the type of knowledge the research questions seek to provide; it does not take the data about individual perspectives at face value, but seeks to add meaning through the researcher's interpretations (Willig, 2013).

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1 Qualitative Method

The existing literature on cyberbullying victimisation has largely relied on quantitative methodologies (Tokunaga, 2010). Quantitative research often fails to take into account the complexity of human experience by overlooking the impact of social and contextual factors and focusing on outcomes. In contrast, qualitative methods provides scope to explore subjective realities and pursue meaning and in the process remains close to the voice of the participant (Smith, 2011). In anticipation of different lived experiences online, a qualitative methodology was also considered to offer an approach that captures multiple perspectives and the richness of experiences.

2.3.2. Ground Theory Methodology

Grounded theory (GT) is a qualitative methodology chosen to meet the study's aims. Originally developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), GT is strongly associated with symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that views meaning as deriving or arising out of social interactions and shared negotiations between people that is understood through social processes (Blumer, 1969). Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that research needed a method that did not rely on nor was restricted by analytical constructs from pre-existing theories or hypothesis testing theory generation. GT was developed to offer a method that allowed new theories to be constructed and such theories would be 'grounded' in the data. Initially, individual cases are studied inductively and as findings of interest are discerned potential theoretical explanations are considered. This is followed by more data gathering to construct the most plausible explanation. Thus, theory evolves iteratively during the research process, through a continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Charmaz, 2014). Through this inductive process GT opens up the possibility for the development of new, contextualised theories. This means theories that make sense within a given context; the environment, time and place in which it developed (Willig, 2001).

2.3.3. Rationale for Grounded Theory

GT was selected because it aims to produce knowledge of contextualised processes. In line with the symbolic interactionist perspective, GT assumes that social realities are negotiated and that participants' interpretations of events shape their consequences. Therefore, it was considered useful in understanding how social situations, such as online experiences, are negotiated. Given the study's aim, to develop an understanding of social processes underpinning young people's experiences online, the objectives of GT were well suited. The term 'processes' refer to the linking of unfolding chronological sequences that lead to change (Charmaz, 2014).

As this study aimed to address the limited theoretical foundation in the cyberbullying literature (Tokunaga, 2010) GT offered a methodology that helped move towards a novel theoretical understanding. In this research, a theory is conceptualised as "a set of well-developed categories that are systematically inter-related through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.22).

GT is also not constrained by pre-existing knowledge which makes it particularly beneficial where there is little known about the process that is of interest (Charmaz, 2014). This made GT particularly useful given the limited research about the influential factors on impact severity and role of resilience in cyberbullying research (Vandoninck *et al.*, 2013; Dredge *et al.*, 2013). Strauss and Corbin (1998) also suggests that grounded theories not only enhance understanding but can also translate meaningfully into action. This was an important aspect of the approach as I intended to provide feedback to the colleges where participants were recruited, and contribute useful clinical implications to wider services (e.g. CAMHS).

2.3.4. Rationale for Constructivist GT

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original GT was founded on positivist assumptions of an objective reality and considered that theories 'emerged' from the data, thus were independent and existed irrespective of the researcher (Charmaz, 2014). However, recent revisions of GT argue that theory is interactional and subjective and therefore is 'constructed' (Charmaz, 2014). It is also argued that positivist GT does not adequately address questions of reflexivity and that the researcher's influences cannot be separated from the theory (Willig, 2013). This ongoing epistemological debates have resulted in a degree of consensus that GT can be used across a continuum of epistemological positions. These include more positivist forms (Glaser, 1992), post-positivist (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and constructivist versions (Charmaz, 2014). From my critical realist position, a constructivist approach to GT is particularly useful as it can be used to consider how context including social-political structures and relationships influence patterns of behaviour, interactions and interpretations (Charmaz, 2014). From this position, I acknowledge my active role in constructing rather than discovering the model which was inevitably influenced by my personal context. I also understand the model is one reality rather than the objective truth. For this reason, a constructivist approach of GT was taken, drawing from the guidance of Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2014).

2.4. Procedure

2.4.1. Youth Research Consultants

There are important shifts from doing research 'with' and more recently 'by' young people (Burton, Smith, & Woods, 2010). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and participatory research literature suggest researchers should maximise young people's opportunities to input throughout the research process (Hill, 2005). Despite this potential there is a lack of involvement of young people, beyond participants, in cyberbullying research (Ackers, 2012). This study collaborated with young people as Youth Research Consultants (YRC). Consultations with the YRC at a London youth centre began during the development of this research proposal and continued throughout the research process.

2.4.2. Ethical Considerations

2.4.2.1. *Ethical approval*

Ethical approval was granted by the University of East London (UEL) School of Psychology Ethics Committee for the proposed study to proceed (Appendix four). The recruitment site did not require independent approval and a copy of the UEL ethics approval was provided to each site who deemed it consistent with their ethical requirements.

2.4.2.2. *Consideration of difference and power*

With cautions to not under-estimate young people's capabilities, Hill (2005) names ability and power as key areas of difference between adults and children that need to be considered in research. Hill (2005) notes that developmentally young people may have less developed verbal abilities, expression and comprehension of abstract ideas. In this study, careful considerations were taken to ensure communication was appropriate. YRC checked the suitability of written information (e.g. information sheets) and during interviews with participants I offered several opportunities for clarification or asking questions. Hill (2005) notes that typically adults are ascribed authority over young people often making it more challenging for young people to disagree with adults. Also, seeking the opinion or views of young people can be an unfamiliar experience for them. Therefore, being critically aware of the inherent power imbalance between myself as an adult/professional and the participants was important. I tried at all times to be sensitive to this when approaching and interviewing participants. I followed recommendations for conducting research with young people (e.g. Hill, 2005) to ensure my interpersonal style was appropriate and to minimise a sense of authority. For example, I used informal and jargon free language and started interviews with a brief informal chat (e.g. what subjects they studied). I also encouraged at least 24 hours between reading the information sheet and agreeing to participate, in the hope that the young person could consider participation thoroughly.

2.4.2.3. Protection from harm

Due to the sensitivity of the topic being discussed I anticipated that participants may become distressed during the interview. Participants were reminded before the interview that they were free to withdraw at any time, to take breaks or reschedule. Throughout interviews, I remained alert to any signs of distress, and I was prepared to discuss sources of further support available to them. Participants were given contact details of organisations for further support and information (see Appendix five). Participants were also encouraged to discuss any risk issues with an appropriate adults (e.g. parents, guardian or teacher). My obligation to respond to any safeguarding concerns and who I would contact was discussed verbally and outlined in the participant information sheet (see Appendix six). To ensure my own safety while conducting the research, a member of staff at the college was informed of my whereabouts and I notified them when interviews finished.

2.4.2.4. Informed consent

An information sheet was given to potential participants and a consent form (see Appendix seven) was completed prior to commencing the interview. Key messages in these forms were summarised verbally in case of reading or comprehension difficulties. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw and that we could take breaks or reschedule the interview. Parental consent was not required as participants were aged 16 to 18 years old. Participants were assessed as Gillick Competent before proceeding with the interviews.

2.4.2.5. Confidentiality and anonymity

Before consenting, participants were informed of the limits of confidentiality. They were informed that should they disclose information that warrants breaking confidentiality (i.e. risk to themselves or others) this would be shared with the research supervisor and with the year tutor at the college. This was arranged with the tutors at each site before commencing recruitment. Limits of confidentiality were explained to the participants verbally and detailed on the consent form and information sheet. All identifying information was altered in transcripts and extracts. It

was made clear to participants that the final research would be shared with the colleges and although it was highly unlikely it was possible that readers might be able to identify contributions. Quotations were carefully selected to protect anonymity. Participant's personal information and consent forms were kept separately to recordings and transcripts and were kept in a confidential locked environment. Electronic files, including scanned consent forms, recordings and transcripts were saved on a password-protected computer. I transcribed all interviews and only I viewed the entire transcripts; small sections were reviewed by university colleagues and my research supervisor to quality-check my analysis. This was made clear to participants before they consented.

2.4.3. Recruitment

Recruitment sites were selected based on pre-existing personal and professional contacts. Posters were placed around the sites to advertise the study (see Appendix eight) and a short verbal presentation was given at each site. The presentation relayed the information provided in the information sheet and information sheets were handed out. I asked the audience if anyone was interested and I approached these students to consider setting up a time to meet. An email with the information sheet attached was circulated to students (see Appendix nine). The posters, email and information sheet included my contact details.

Seven participants made contact via email and seven participants arranged an interview following the presentations and this was followed up by an email confirmation. Three young people made initial contact but did not wish to follow through with the interview. The reasons for this were not sought. Interviews took place at the colleges. Recruitment and interviews occurred between July 2016 and February 2017.

2.4.4. Participants

Young people aged 16 to 18 years old were recruited because UK research on cyberbullying has predominately studied younger adolescents (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). It was thought that young people this age may be able to offer retrospective accounts which may position them in a safer and more reflective place to discuss their experiences, and what would have helped. Thus providing insight into where and how interventions would be best implemented. As parental consent is not required for this age group, it is thought that this may encourage willingness to self-disclose. Further, a tight age group allows for homogeneity in regards to the participant's developmental stage. Recruiting from multiple recruitment sites in different London areas was intended to promote demographical heterogeneity.

Fourteen participants were interviewed. On average they used four social networking sites/apps every day. Participant's demographic details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant's demographic information

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Emily	F	17	White– British
Nisha	F	16	Black – Caribbean British
Sadaf	F	17	Asian - Bangladeshi British
Jamal	M	17	Black- African Somali
Gloria	F	18	Portuguese
Mary	F	17	Black- Caribbean British
Ray	M	17	Black- Caribbean British
Marlon	M	17	Black- Caribbean British
Josh	M	18	White-British
Karim	M	17	Arab - Middle Eastern
Aisha	F	17	Arab – North African
Yvette	F	17	Black –African British
Femi	F	18	Black –African British
Jean	F	16	Asian

2.4.5. Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

With the aim of gathering broad data in the early stages of GT, an indiscriminate approach was taken to recruitment. No participant were excluded or specifically recruited based on demographics. The inclusion criteria included the age restriction and participants had to self-identify as either current or previous users of social media. Non-English speaking individuals were excluded as the research method required an individual's descriptions of experiences and language was considered important within this. Participants' ability to communicate verbally needed to be at a level whereby they were able to carry out the interview. The use of an interpreter was not possible due to lack of funding.

2.4.6. Data collection

2.4.6.1 Resources

Audio-recording, transcribing equipment and a password-protected computer was used. Each participant was given the option of carrying out the interview at UEL or their college. All interviews took place in a private classroom at the colleges.

2.4.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews² were used to collect data. Interviews are a common source of data in GT and understood as a 'directed conversation' which allows in-depth explorations of a topic (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). Interviews also enable rapport and trust to develop ways that other methods, such as a focus group, may not allow (Power, 1995). This was an important feature considering the sensitivity of the subject.

To develop a novel theoretical understanding in GT it is important that careful consideration is taken from the interview stage to avoid forcing data into preconceived categories (Charmaz, 2014). The initial interview schedule was designed to balance the need to address the research questions while allowing participants the opportunity to redefine the topic under discussion and generate new

² To be referred to as 'interviews' from this point.

insights (Charmaz, 2014). The interview questions were shaped by my knowledge of the literature on cyberbullying that was gathered during the research proposal submission and ideas gathered from the YRCs. The questions initially aimed to be broad, open-ended and neutral to enable participants to introduce novel insights (Charmaz, 2014). Initial topics in the interview schedule included demographics and SNS use questions and aimed to relax the participant. It then moved to sensitive topics, which were assumed to be centred around personal negative experiences online. Towards the end of the interview I tried to use more de-personalised questions, for example, asking participants what advice they would give to others. This was intended to facilitate endings with less emotional responses. The interview schedules were checked over and approved by the YRCs. As the data generation and analysis developed the interview schedule was amended. Questions became more specific as categories were explored (Charmaz, 2014). See Appendix ten for the interview schedule and amendments.

2.4.7. Interview process

Data was collected in two waves of semi-structured interviews. Eight participants were interviewed in the first wave and six participants in the second wave. My first interview with Emily was conducted as a pilot interview as a way of receiving feedback about the process. Emily reported that she felt comfortable with the process, the topics discussed were relevant and she felt able to respond to questions. The pilot interview was included in the data set. Continual feedback was sought from each participant. Participants were asked if they would recommend any changes or additions to the interview questions and if there was anything said in the interview that they would prefer was not used in the research. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. As recommended by Charmaz (2011) reflections were recorded in a reflective diary after interviews.

In GT the principle of theoretical saturation is the key consideration when deciding how many interviews represent sufficient data (Charmaz, 2014). However, due to time constraints resulting from a submission date, reaching saturation in this study was not possible. Instead, the study aimed for theoretical sufficiency. Theoretical

sufficiency describes the point at which the researcher can generate categories that explain the data sufficiently without forcing it into a framework (Charmaz, 2014).

2.5. Procedure For Analysis

Systematic coding is essential to GT. This study used three levels of coding: initial (line by line coding), focused and selective. These were used interchangeably throughout the analysis together with other GT methods, as described below.

Initial coding involves breaking data into analysable fragments and applying to each a specific and short label describing the processes or occurrences that seem to be taking place (Charmaz, 2014). The focus is remaining close to the data and labelling actions and drawing attention to meaning. In vivo codes (using the participant's words) and gerund codes were helpful here. Initial codes are provisional and highlighted recurrent ideas and gaps in the data which were explored through further data generation.

Focused coding is the next stage whereby the most salient aspects of the data are focused on. It involves organising frequent, related and seemingly meaningful initial codes together to develop higher-level categories. This stage moves away from description towards a more analytic and interpretative level but still remains close to the data (Charmaz, 2014). See Appendix eleven for an example of initial and focused coding. Focused codes were then grouped together to construct sub-categories which belong to categories and give it further clarification and specification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Constant comparative analysis, is another key characteristic of GT (Charmaz, 2014). It involved looking and comparing the data for similarities, differences and nuances within and across transcripts to develop a more abstract understanding of the data. It

was particularly useful in the move between initial coding and focused coding and helped to refine, link and integrate categories.

Memo-writing is a process of keeping written records throughout data collection and analysis to provide coherent threads between coding and the theory development (Charmaz, 2014). By memo-writing I kept a record of ideas, reflection, and decision making which aided the constant comparative method. See examples of memos in Appendix twelve.

Data was analysed until there were no further refinements of categories that could be made within the dataset. In GT theoretical sampling supports the refining of categories. It is the process of selecting sources of data according to the findings of the analysis that has emerged (Charmaz, 2014). As mentioned, due to time constraints theoretical sufficiency as an alternative to theoretical sampling and saturation guided the refining process (Charmaz, 2014).

Finally, through selective coding and theoretical integration, codes and categories were organised and linked into to form a story with explanatory power and depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

2.6. Reflexivity

Taking a critical realist perspective assumes that complete objectivity is impossible; instead interviews are a site of co-constructed meaning (Burr, 2003). Therefore, it is important to recognise the extent to which the one own personal context shapes how they connect with the literature, the interview process and interpretation of the data. Therefore, reflexivity is essential and involves becoming aware and reflecting on the influences of the researcher's own perspectives within the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Writing a reflexive journal supported this process. See Appendix thirteen for a

reflexive piece about my personal context and position in relation to the research topic.

2.7. Evaluation Criteria

I have drawn upon Yardley's (2000) qualitative research criteria to offer an appropriate framework for evaluating a constructionist version of GT. The following criterion will be explained and considered in the Discussion Chapter:

Sensitivity to context

Commitment and Rigour

Transparency and Coherence

Impact and Importance

Researcher reflexivity

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Overview

This chapter provides an account of a grounded model. It proposes one way of understanding the factors and processes that facilitated how the fourteen participants faced negative experiences on SNS.

3.2. Terminology

The identified online experience(s) will be referred to as a cyber-act(s). This term is used because it simply describes the experiences as what it is, an act that has occurred online, rather than imposing a construction. Participants reflected on their own experiences and spoke more generally about young people's experiences on SNS.

3.3. Grounded Theory Model

One overarching category was constructed; '(Re)building a self-concept and Protective shielding' to encapsulate the overall processes that were constructed from the data. This category comprises of eight categories which include; 'Online context' 'Cyber-act factors', 'Being targeted', 'Attack to Self-concept & Social Status', 'Making Sense of the Experience', 'Strategies for Managing', and 'Beyond the Cyber-act: (Re)building a Self-concept & Protective Shielding'. The remaining category 'Levels of contexts' intervenes and interacts across all categories. Each category is comprised of subcategories, constructed from grouping focused codes.

3.4. (Re)Building a Self-Concept & Protective Shielding: The Process of Facing Negative Experiences on SNS

‘(Re)building a Self-concept & Protective shielding’ overarches the other categories in the model. Together the categories describe my understanding of the central processes of making sense of, managing and protecting against difficult online experiences and what influences these processes. This process involves young people transitioning to a constructed protective context in which they described developing a protective buffer against difficult online experiences. Developing this protective buffer involves re-gaining control and (re)building and re-connecting to their self-concept which is undermined during a cyber-act. In addition, participants consolidate their learning from their experiences online to construct protective ways of being on SNS. In doing this, the participants described being better positioned to resist the negative impact of cyber-acts and anticipated future negative experiences online. Contexts are defined as the conditions within which resources and relationships occur and particular actions and interactions are afforded. The micro level contexts described above are embedded in wider macro contexts. Different levels of context influence the process throughout.

The model is introduced in a diagrammatic form. Although presented in a linear fashion the process was described as fluid and dynamic, which will be illustrated in the description of the model. In the model black arrows illustrate possible routes of feedback between each categories. The ‘levels of context’ category has an influence across categories and is also influenced upon, therefore double arrowed lines are used to represent this feedback. Categories, subcategories and focused codes are presented within single quotation marks, and in-vivo codes within double quotation marks. Categories are presented in bold text and subcategories in italic text. Direct quotations are represented by participant’s alias names (followed by page numbers). ‘I’ refers to interviewer. See Appendix fourteen for a full outline of the transcription conventions used. A list of the categories and subcategories are presented below in Table 2 and a table including focused codes is presented in Appendix fifteen. A diagrammatic presentation of the model (Figure 1) follows and then a summary of the model.

Table 2: Categories & Subcategories

Categories	Subcategories
Levels Of Context	<i>Socio-Political Context</i> <i>School Context</i> <i>Family/Peers & Community Context</i> <i>Individual Context</i>
Cyber Context	<i>Online Culture</i> <i>Cyber-contextual Factors</i>
Cyber-Act Factors	<i>"No Getting Away"</i> <i>"Being Exposed"</i> <i>Knowing the Perpetrator</i>
Being Targeted	
Attack On Self-Concept & Social Status	
Making Sense Of The Experience	<i>Assessing Threat, Seriousness & Acceptability</i> <i>Understanding External Factors</i> <i>"Being in Control"</i>
Strategies For Managing	<i>Technical strategies</i> <i>Confronting</i> <i>"Brushing it off"</i> <i>Accepting</i> <i>Confiding in others (vs. not confiding)</i> <i>Receiving Support</i> <i>Re-focusing</i>
Allowing Time	
Beyond The Cyber-Act: (Re)Building Self-Concept & Protective Shielding	<i>Consolidating Learning</i> <i>Defining Self</i>

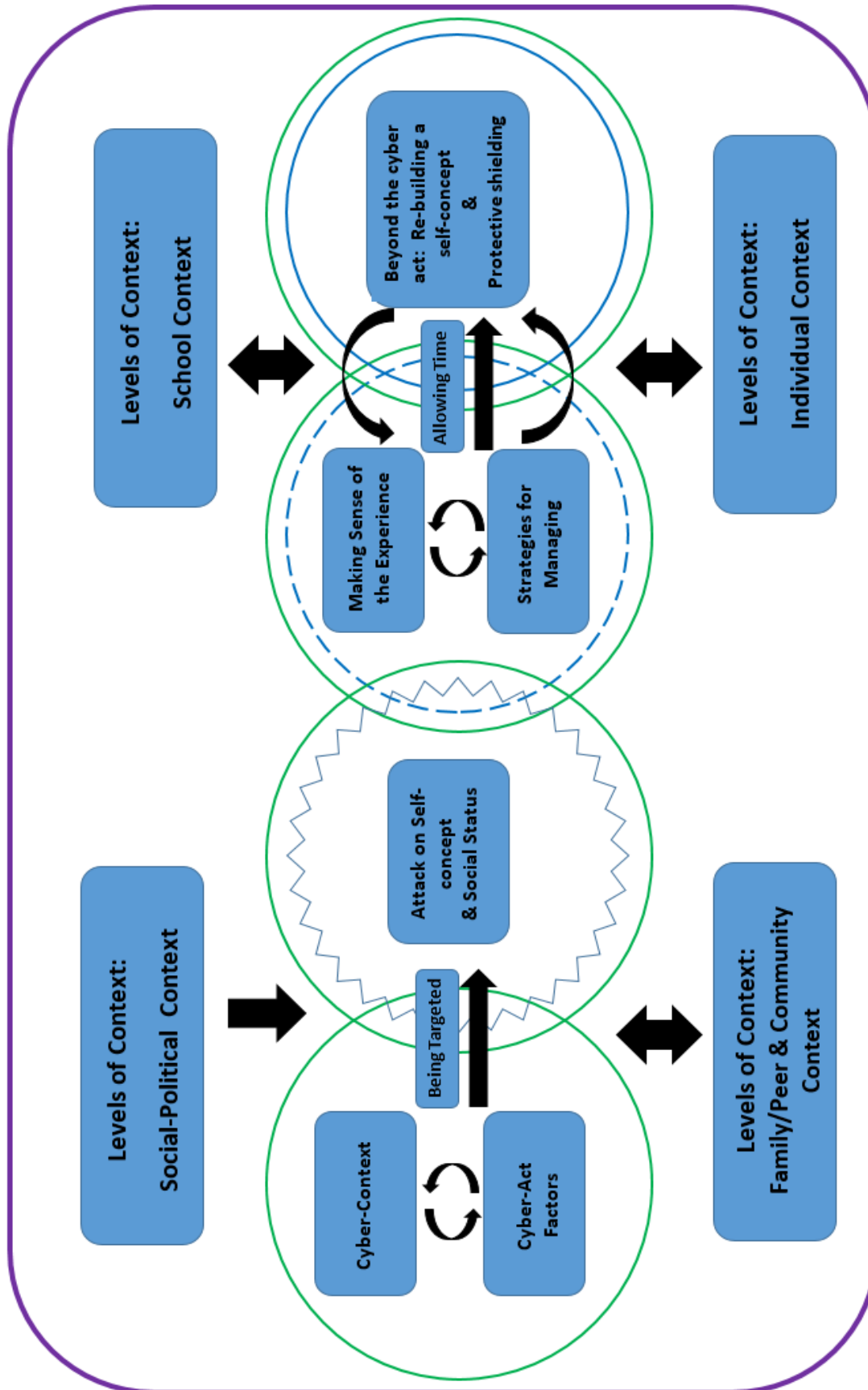


Figure 1: (Re)Building a Self-Concept & Protective Shielding Model

Young people are immersed in a '**Cyber-Context**' (represented by the overlapping green circles), which they describe as an integral part of their lives. This context is described as having an '*Online Culture*' which can evoke feelings of vulnerability. Participants emphasised that everyone is at risk of encountering negative experiences and this has become an 'Accepted Norm' of what it means to be online. Distinct '*Cyber-contextual factors*' present a number of properties, which effect the impact of a negative experience and the processes involved in trying to manage it. In conjunction, the cyber-act itself includes particular '**Cyber-Act Factors**' that can intensify the impact of the experience. Each subsequent process interacts with the '**Cyber-Context**' and '**Cyber-Act Factors**'. This is represented by the green circle in which subsequent processes are illustrated within.

Further action (or inaction) requires recognition from the young person that they are '**Being Targeted**'. This process moves the young person to becoming more aware of the impact of the experience. The cyber-act typically strikes at the core of the individual's being as their self-concept and social status becomes under attack. This is represented by the category '**Attack on Self-Concept & Social Status**'. The zigzag blue circle is used to diagrammatically illustrate the attack to one's self-concept.

As one's self-concept(s) is attacked and undermined, several of the following processes involved a (re)building of their self-concept and developing ways to protect it from anticipated future attacks. This begins with '**Making Sense of The Experience**' which involves cognitive and emotional processes to determine the degree of threat, seriousness, and acceptability of the cyber-act, to ascertain causality and responsibility, and assess their level of control. This occurs over time from minutes to years, and is highly influenced by the role of others and the context. Simultaneously, an interacting process occurs in which the young person responds using different '**Strategies for Managing**'. Participants described ways they managed with the primary aim to end the attack and minimise the impact by re-gaining control and working towards re-building their self-concept and protective shield. The dashed blue circle illustrates the fluid processing and responding.

‘Allowing Time’ for these processes enables the young person to move beyond the cyber-act. **‘Beyond The Cyber-Act – (Re)Building Self-Concept & Protective Shielding’** is where young people describe consolidating their learning and taking ownership to define themselves. In doing this, participants develop a protective shield; a context whereby they feel they have a securer self-concept, awareness of online risks and protective ways of being online. The process of consolidating learning and defining themselves is an interacting and dynamic process. It involves a constant re-adjusting and developing of the protective shield as their experiences online and offline continue to shape them. The participants describe the inevitability of experiencing difficult experiences on SNS, however, with a protective shield they feel more able to face it. The solid blue circle diagrammatically illustrates the protective shield.

The **‘Levels of Context’** category represents the interrelating contexts including the *socio-political context, school, family/peer & community context* and *individual context* (e.g. age, gender) that influences across all categories. Participants described risk and protective factors and the role of others within each context that influenced the processes to differing degrees throughout. Therefore, the **‘Levels of Context’** are represented in unilateral lines around the central process as the highest level of context (i.e. most influential) will differ for each young person.

3.5. Detailed Analysis

The categories, subcategories and the relationships within and between categories will be described in detail. This will be supported by the inclusion of participants’ quotations. The discussion of the category **‘Levels of Context’** is interwoven throughout. Focused codes which were used in the construction of subcategories will also be used as headings (underlined) to organise material where variation within subcategories exist.

3.6. 'Cyber-Context'

This category represents participant's perceptions of the online context, particularly focusing on the factors that influence how and why (causal factors) young people have negative online experiences (i.e. a cyber-act). This category firstly captures online and societal cultural norms that participants felt shaped SNS practices and fosters an environment for negative experiences, before outlining the contextual factors of the cyber-context that can mediate experiences online.

3.6.1. 'Online Culture'

This subcategory pertains to participant's perception of intersecting societal, individual and cyberspace factors that create an online culture that can cultivate negative experiences. Participants referred to reasons why young people may be more susceptible to experiencing negative online experiences within the current cyber context, these are outlined below.

3.6.1.1. 'Social comparisons'

Participants viewed SNS as a space that fuels social comparisons. This in turn creates a competitive context where they constantly feel vulnerable to criticism.

Sadaf: Everyone is comparing themselves and everyone else on their appearance, money, number of followers...and you know whatever you say or do you'll have 100 critics. (pg.4)

The pervasive social comparing was seen to elicit feelings of jealousy and dissatisfaction which could motive hurtful acts.

Aisha: people will be positive and build you up or hate on you, some people see you doing well and that makes them feel rubbish so they want to bring you down.(pg.5)

Many spoke about '*Socio-Political Context*' influences such as materialism which fuelled the social comparison.

Nisha: Everyone is following trends and trying to be like someone else...there is this pressure to have all these materialistic things...then we all compare ourselves and judge each other on these ridiculous superficial standards. (pg.13)

Participants implied how easy it is for young people to engage in aggressive behaviour owing to the competitiveness that results from social comparisons. Young people compete to build their social status and consolidate social capital at other people's expense.

Nisha: people want to big up themselves to their friends so they put other people down...so they get respected. (pg.6).

The desire for social capital can also lead to risky behaviour online.

Sadaf:...I'd just accept any friend request because everyone got compared and the more friends you have, the better people saw you. (pg.3)

Participants described how comparing themselves to others often results in them putting themselves down which has a lasting effect on self-esteem. Given that all participants perceived having high self-esteem as an important protective factor against negative experiences online, the thriving context for social comparisons inadvertently impacted how young people managed.

Mary: it's so easy to compare yourself to people...and it effects your confidence, your self-esteem and once that is broken it is even harder to be online and it's not just social media like social media leads on to more comparing in your life, it's constant. (pg.17)

3.6.1.2. 'Accepted norms'

Participants described how norms of social communication on SNS have edged them towards an increased tolerance for demeaning humour and discriminatory attitudes in society. This coincides with an expectation that one must have a higher tolerance for insults and discrimination online merely because of its relatively routine occurrence.

Karim: ...to get by [online] you have to take it [referring to discrimination] and be tough. (pg.27)

This together with the increasing confusion regarding what constitutes as harmless 'banter' or hurtful activity, confounded the participant's ability to recognising an experience as unacceptable.

Femi: There is banter and there is actual offensive things. I feel like people tend to mix the two, and that makes it difficult to know if its cyberbullying. (pg.23)

This is further complicated by the perception that experiencing a cyber-act is an inevitable and normative dimension of online relationships and experiences.

Sadaf: it's like a side effect to social media. It's like something that comes always, you're going to experience it...I think it's just accepted...everyone is at risk of being targeted online and for anything. (pg.6)

Assumptions about the universality of cyber-acts and normative perspectives were seen to facilitate aggressive behaviour online as it distorted the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Nisha: Because it happens so much I think people go “oh they did it so it is ok to be nasty to others on Facebook”, people are just sheep. (pg.4)

It also created a sense of uncertainty as participants felt they were at constant risk, making them feel “vulnerable on social media” (Mary, pg.24). This was particularly illuminated by participants who described how the sense of risk deters them from intervening as bystanders. Participants described how “turning a blind eye” (Marlon, pg.20) was the only way to protect themselves.

Marlon: Defending others can still be quite difficult...there is always the risk of them turning on you and you become the target. (pg.20)

3.6.2. *‘Cyber Contextual Factors’*

This subcategory outlines a number of contextual characteristics of cyber communication that were considered to mediate negative online experiences and its impact severity.

Participants described how online anonymity encouraged abusive behaviour which would be considered unacceptable or simply would not happen in face to face situations. This, together with the lack of ability for the perpetrator to witness the impact directly was considered to escalate the abuse and exacerbate the impact. Anonymity and a sense of disconnection was also perceived to lessen people’s empathy online.

Jamal: Online they have a screen in front of them, because they can be anonymous or not even anonymous but like distance, not face to face, they say things that are hurtful and because they don't see how it hurts you or just cos they don't care they just keep at it. I think people say things that they wouldn't dare to say to your face. (pg.7)

Due to anonymity online, Nisha, Jean, Sadaf and Josh were unable to determine the perpetrator's identity. Nisha and Sadaf spoke about how the anonymity of the perpetrator made their experience more difficult. They described constantly deliberating the perpetrator's motives and who it could be, which in turn impacted their ability to trust others.

Nisha: ...It was difficult not knowing who it was, like why...I was wary of everyone, cos I didn't know whether they were in on it or not. (pg.6)

However, for Jean and Josh, their own anonymity online (i.e. an alias username) in addition to the anonymity of the perpetrator was described as a protective factor because this made the abusive comments feel less personal.

Josh: Facebook has my name up and some information, but on YouTube I'm pretty much completely anonymous which made it easier because it wasn't directly about me. (pg.11)

The potential visibility of a cyber-act (i.e. public vs. private) was discussed in relation to the wider breath of audience online. The large audience and cyber context enabled the potential for material to spread quickly like "wildfire" (Emily, pg.19) and created opportunities of being targeted by multiple people. This intensified the attack; making it feel as if they were "on the firing line" (Yvette, pg.8). The '*Peer Context*' becomes important here, as peers often act as bystanders and potential perpetrators

if they get involved. Multiple perpetrators seemed to increase the impact of the experience.

Nisha: ...it travels so quickly...when you have one person, "Okay, you're a hoe." That's great. But when you've got them and their friends and their friends... It just gets too much for one person to deal with, it's uncontrollable. So I feel like when it's spreading, it makes the impact much worse. (pg.11)

Some participants felt that when a cyber-act was public it could attract more opportunities for bystander support.

Femi: So, it would start on social media but it would also end with social media in a good way because people would reply to the comments supportively. (pg.5)

Others disagreed explaining that most bystanders "add fuel making it worse" (Yvette, pg.8) rather than being supportive.

The impact of an experience often depends on how much control the participant had over the medium. Participants referred to the increased accessibility to private information and the permanency of material online. This created uncertainty for participants as content could resurface at any time which impacted on their sense of control and agency. Participants also voiced feelings of helplessness and hopelessness if they were unable to remove distressing material from SNS.

Sadaf: I reported them [photos] but that didn't always help because they were still there...they still had the pictures saved on their desktop. They can still make another account...it felt like there was nothing else I can do...I felt like giving up. (pg.15)

Participants also described difficulties in recognising a negative cyber-act and determining intent owing to the limited visual social cues online.

Gloria: It's not easy to identify what is like cyberbully because it's not just obvious stuff like people saying oh go kill yourself...and sometimes people will post something and say they are joking, like LOL you just can't tell but it isn't a joke, it's bullying but people don't know whether it is. (pg.17)

3.7. 'Cyber-Act Factors'

This category represents the salient properties across participant's description of the cyber-acts that mediated the impact of the experience. Each subcategory could be situated along dimensions of low to high risks. Three subcategories were constructed; "*No getting away*", "*Being exposed*" and "*Knowing the perpetrator*". These subcategories incorporate concepts such as duration, frequency and intensity of the participant's experience. While there is particular commonality with the '*Cyber Contextual Factors*' subcategory, it is thought that that '**Cyber-Act Factors**' are distinct because they are not solely attributed or a result of the cyber-context.

3.7.1. "*No Getting Away*"

A cyber-act that was experienced as constant and repetitive increased the intensity of the experience. What constituted as a constant experience was subjective, and ranged from a cyber-act occurring every hour to every day. The constancy could also change over time. Participants spoke about how the "constant targeting" (Aisha, pg.3) made it feel like there was no respite. The constancy of a cyber-act was mediated by the 24hr accessibility online and the domain of the act. Participant's described cyber-acts occurring across multiple SNS, privately and publically on SNS and online as well as offline (e.g. at school). It appeared that if participants' experience was across multiple domains the emotional impact was intensified and there were fewer opportunities for relief.

Yvette: It was just annoying to pick up my phone and see she's saying stuff about me and then I go to school and she was saying stuff about me, just constant...I just couldn't get away, it was just really frustrating. (pg.18)

3.7.2. *"Being exposed"*

Participants spoke about the degree of exposure of personal information, photos or videos (e.g. naked photos). Cyber-acts that were more exposing were experienced or perceived to be more difficult to manage and emotionally upsetting. The degree of exposure was discussed in relation to anonymity and control over the content. If a cyber-act was highly exposing and the perpetrator was also anonymous or the participants was unable to remove the material this was described as worse. Also, the sense of exposure was mediated by other '*Cyber-Contextual Factors*' including the breath of audience online, the permanency and spreadability of material.

Nisha:...the nudes thing is a very difficult one. I'm not sure how to deal with that. I can say be positive but then when people have photographic evidence of you doing something that is exposing and then they gonna have it forever. That's a very hard thing to deal with. (pg.20)

3.7.3. *'Knowing the perpetrator'*

Participants agreed that knowing the perpetrator made a cyber-act experience "feel more personal" (Yvette, pg.20). They described the difference between the perpetrator being entirely anonymous, simply knowing the perpetrator's identity (e.g. their name) and knowing the perpetrator personally (e.g. a peer). The latter seemed to evoke an anticipated fear that the cyber-act could have far-reaching and a longer term impact on one's life. This was attributed to the increased risk of it impacting or spreading across close social networks which lessened opportunities for respite or/and increased risk to their reputation. Some participants reported that cyber-acts carried out by someone they knew resulted in them losing friends, feeling more embarrassed and wanting to avoid or move schools.

Mary: ...the fact that I saw her every day. I guess because I knew her, it was difficult to get away. Like and she knew everyone I knew, she told everyone and it kinda made me paranoid and embarrassed, I hated going in to school..(pg.17)

Participants explained that it is easier to ignore a cyber-act if they did not know the perpetrator personally.

Karim: if I don't know you then I don't care. Like, who are you? It is just easier to forget about it. (pg.15)

3.8. 'Being Targeted'

This category represents the process of identifying oneself as a target of a cyber-act. Participants spoke about realising that the perpetrator intended to cause harm and that often their actions became repetitive.

Yvette: I realised I was being targeted for no reason, and they were doing it on purpose and it wouldn't stop, that is when I thought it wasn't ok anymore.(pg.13)

Participants emphasised that judging intent was often subjective. When it was difficult to establish intentionality they would consider the extent of the impact or whether the act was repeated as indicators of intent.

Ray: It depends on how you see it and how it makes you feel cos sometimes it is impossible to know if they really mean it. (pg. 6)

Some participants turned to peers to help them establish intent if it was unclear.

Femi:...I asked my friend what she thought cos it was difficult to tell if they really meant it.(pg.5)

Some participants felt that the act did not need to be repeated. In such instances, acts that were exposing, seen by many and/or had a significant emotional impact were perceived to have the potential to be just as difficult as repeated experiences.

Mary: It just needs to take one really bad thing, one big exposure just the once or something goes viral, that can have a really bad impact. (pg. 26)

Participants made an important distinction between the construction of a “target” and a “victim”. Participants associated the concept of being a victim with cyberbullying. When participants were asked how they would describe their experience, participants did not use the term “cyberbullying”. Emily, Jean and Gloria occasionally described their experience as being ‘bullied online’, in contrast all participants used the term “target”. Being a victim seemed to be associated with a power imbalance between them and the perpetrator which heightened a sense of threat. Therefore, “cyberbullying” seemed to presume that the target adopted a subjugated position. Also, although participants described a degree of emotional, social and behavioural impact, they did not feel the extent of the impact was “bad enough” (Jean, pg. 14) to be describe it as cyberbullying.

Jean: Cyberbullying, it's when someone changes the way they think about themselves...it has a really big impact over your life....So her, the girl that I used to talk to, I felt like that was the closest thing to being bullied

online...because I was being hounded on, it was her forcing me into a corner.
(pg.14)

Yvette's extracts below also captures some of the connotation participant's associated with the word "victim" and "cyberbullying".

I: What's the difference between your experience and cyberbullying?

Yvette: I wouldn't call it cyberbullying because that sounds like you're a victim and I'm not a victim. No one can pick on me and think they can get the best of me. I'm stronger than that. I wouldn't say that they're bullying me that's why I wouldn't use that term because I could stand up for myself...I wasn't scared of her... she didn't have power over me. (pg.13)

This highlights the way wider discourses about victimisation within the '*Socio-Political Context*' could be influencing how the participants made sense of their experience, which in turns influences how they manage.

The process of identifying oneself as a target was initial recognition that the cyber-act was a cause for concern. Participants then became more aware of its impact and this initiated further sense-making processes about how to respond.

3.9. 'Attack on Self-Concept & Social Status'

This category describes the core impact found across participants' descriptions. Participants described emotional, social and behavioural impacts to differing degrees and some described minimal impact. What appeared to underline and connect these impacts was the attack to one's self-concept and social status. For most participants this attack was seen to be an intentional impact.

Aisha: They are purposely putting people down...to make you feel rubbish about who you are and to ruin your reputation". (pg.9)

The attack had implications for how participants viewed themselves as it undermined or made them question their self-concept.

Marlon: I felt pretty insecure...it makes you question yourself, it makes you question what you actually are. (pg. 11)

It impacted on relationships with peers and put their social status at risk. Here the effect on one's '*Peer Context*' is evident.

Nisha: It ruined my reputation, cos people thought I did wrong, people stopped talking to me...and I kinda didn't want to be around people. (pg.11)

Participants spoke about feeling paralysed in the face of judgment and powerless to influence others' actions and opinions.

Sadaf: I wasn't talking to a lot of people because they believed the stuff online was true and no matter what I did or said they wouldn't believe me, I couldn't do anything. (pg.5)

As one's self-concept(s) came under attack, several of the following processes involved a (re)building of their self-concept and ways to protect it from inevitable future attacks.

3.10. 'Making Sense of The Experience'

During this phase, several cognitive and emotional processes occur that move the participants towards different strategies for managing. Participants seem to attempt to process and evaluate the cyber-act by asking themselves a series of questions in a deliberate effort to make sense of their experience. Subcategories include; *'Assessing Threat, Seriousness and Acceptability'*, *'Understanding External Factors'* and *"Being in Control"*. The processes within these subcategories were described as interrelated, circular and repeated, with each process affecting the other. The sense making processes influence participants' selection of **'Strategies For Managing'** and vice-versa. This is illustrated below.

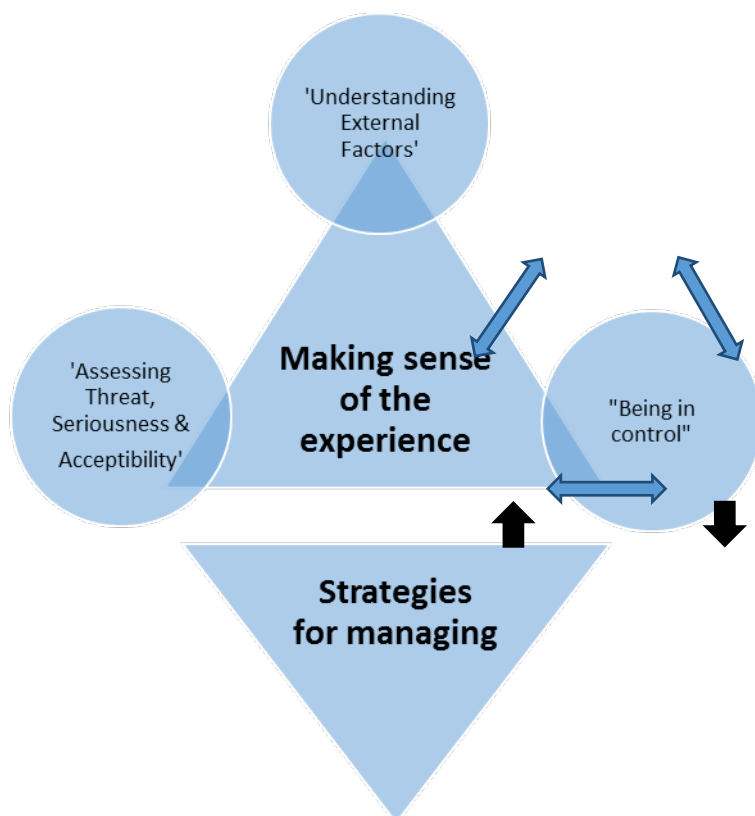


Figure 2: Interrelation between 'Making Sense of Experience' & 'Strategies for Managing'

3.10.1. *'Assessing Threat, Seriousness and Acceptability'*

Each participant described ongoing appraisals of the level of the threat, seriousness and acceptability of the cyber-act. A cyber-act could pose as a threat in many ways

including a threat to one's safety, social status and self-concept. In attempts to determine the degree of threat and seriousness, participants often considered the '**Cyber-Act Factors**' particularly the level of exposure, the consistency and their relationship to the perpetrator. In parallel, participants evaluated the degree of impact. If emotional reactions such as feeling scared and overwhelmed intensified the seriousness was perceived to be greater and often prompted action.

Emily:...he sent threatening messages, like, "I'll kill you if you tell anyone"...I was kind of scared...if I wasn't scared I would have just left it but I was, so I had to tell someone. (pg.11)

Another way participants evaluated the seriousness and acceptability was by comparing their experience to other current and historical cyber-acts within their '*School Context*' and the media ('*Socio-Political Context*'). This often resulted in minimising the seriousness of their own experience because the cyber-acts that gain publicity tended to be of extreme severity. Therefore, in making comparisons participants often concluded that their experience "was not really that bad" (Gloria, pg.6).

Emily: ...it was so little like there was so much more going on in my year around the time that this didn't seem like such a big deal. (pg.16)

The consequence of this could be either hindering or helpful. Some participants described feeling that they "can't let it get to [them] because people experience much worse" (Mary, pg.4), which suggests possible implications for suppressing emotional processing. Other participants found that by comparing their experience they felt more able to face the situation. For those that described the latter response, recognising that the perpetrators behaviour was unacceptable was important.

I: You said people experience a lot worse and so you thought your experience wasn't as bad. What sort of impact did that thought have on you?

Sadaf: The thing is I understood that it was wrong and I knew it was ok to be worried about it. (pg.6)

Assessing seriousness and acceptability also involved assuming how it would be perceived by others. In doing this, participants referred to the 'Accepted norms', particularly peer perceptions regarding the inevitability and universality of a cyber-act experience. The influence of the '*Peer Context*' overlapped here.

Sadaf:...I thought people [friends] think it's normal, it happens and it is not that serious so at first I thought it was normal. (pg. 6)

Others spoke about gaining peer perspectives which helped participants feel reassured that the cyber-act was unacceptable regardless of 'Accepted norms'.

Gloria:...people reminded me every day that it was actually bully, that it is not ok, even if it is happening to everyone. (pg.15)

The influence of the '*Family Context*' was also evident. Some participants spoke about their sense of self-worth, connecting this to their upbringing and reflecting on how it supports them in recognising mistreatment.

Aisha:...I knew it was wrong. Because I think it's the way you're raised...I was raised not to accept being taken for a mug...I know I don't deserve to be treated that way. (pg.9)

3.10.2. '*Understanding External Factors*'

Participants considered why the cyber-act occurred and who was responsible. Most early explanations attribute the causes to the individual's wrong doing. For some this

thinking was reinforced by their '*Peers & Family Context*' and wider discourses ('*Socio-Political Context*') that emphasised it was the young person's responsibility to be cautious online. This gave rise to internal victimising involving unhelpful self-blaming and self-critical thoughts, which obscured the actions of the perpetrator. It often resulted in unhelpful behaviours that served to protect any further damage to one's self-concept such as isolating oneself and not confiding in others. The internal victimising in addition to the external victimising increased the impact severity.

Nisha: People say, "Why did you do that?"... It really makes it worse cos you just dwell...You start to blame yourself and think it's just your fault. So you kinda forget that what the person did to you is actually wrong or even worse you think you deserve it...cos of that kind of thinking I started to avoid people. (pg.16)

However, often with some peer support participants moved towards situating their experience in context. As participants evaluate the perpetrators actions and motives, self-blame begins to lessen. Some participants turned to their peers ('*Peer Context*') to gauge their understanding of the situation, which could then be used to inform their own thinking. The cyber-act was also contextualised, as participants began to understand their experience within the broader context. Some found normative ideas around the universality and inevitability of cyber-acts helpful.

Femi: ... I asked my friends what they thought and that helped me know it wasn't my fault...my friends would also say that, "People attack you for anything all the time on social media...it's not like you're the only one." That was a sense of relief cos I realised it wasn't about me. (pg.11)

Some participants situated their experience in the wider '*Socio-Political Context*'. Jamal related his experience to discriminatory discourses based on ethnicity and religion ('*Individual Context*') that permeate online.

Jamal: There is so much hate toward Muslims, especially with terrorism and stuff, people just bring their hate online and take it out on innocent people like me. (pg.6)

For others understanding the external factors and externalising responsibility did not take any deliberation. This seemed to be the case for those who described having a prior awareness of potential risks which protected them from self-blame. This awareness often came from influences within the '*Family Context*'.

Marlon: My mum always spoke to me and said, "Look, if something happens, then you always have that button to report it. These people are in the wrong, nobody should do that to another person. You speak to me about it." So I had that support and knowledge. (pg.10)

Situating the experience in context and moving away from internalising responsibility was viewed as helpful processes for managing and buffering the negative impacts.

3.10.3. "*Being in Control*"

Being in control was a key factor throughout the process. It involved assessing how much power one had to change the situation and this process was mediated by the '**Cyber-act Factors**' and '**Cyber-Context**'. It often depended on how much control the participant had over the medium, particularly because the cyber-context afforded perpetrators control over the content and their anonymity. In instances, where participants felt they had little control over the situation they described an increased sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

Jean: Even though he was harassing me I was more dominant because I could still control what was going on...when you actually don't have control of the situation, like you can't take a post down or it spreads, you really feel that nothing can be done. (pg.7)

3.11. 'Strategies for Managing': Minimising the impact and re-gaining control

This category captures the different ways participants responded to their experience to minimise the negative impact, gain control and try to end the cyber-act. Seven subcategories were constructed; '*Technical Strategies*', '*Confronting*', '*Brushing it off*', '*Accepting*', '*Confiding (vs. not confiding)*', '*Receiving support*' and '*Re-focusing*'. These refer to interpersonal, intrapersonal and technical strategies that were employed. Most participants used a number of strategies and therefore each strategy was not presented as working in isolation. Different strategies were employed at different times and this related to the participants' meaning-making processes. The usefulness of strategies was constantly evaluated and had differing effects for each participant depending on their own context and the nature of the cyber-act.

3.11.1. '*Technical Strategies*'

Technical strategies were employed by all participants. This included blocking people, reporting accounts or posts, deleting comments, photos, conversations and deactivating accounts. Participants described these strategies as their first point of call but emphasised one needed to have the knowledge and education of how to use technical strategies ('*Individual Context*'). Participants found technical strategies somewhat helpful in reducing or stopping the cyber-act from escalating. However, for some participants technical strategies were only partially helpful as material could remain online or could be saved. Technical strategies were less effective when a cyber-act was occurring across domains and when the perpetrator was known personally because participants felt this strategy did not reduce the sense of not being able to escape.

Aisha: I blocked him and ignored him but it just continued on twitter and then he came to my work place. (pg.6)

For some coming offline helped them create distance or avoid distressing content, giving them space to consider options for addressing the issue.

Gloria: I just took myself away for sometime...giving myself sometime away from the rubbish, to breathe and think about what to do. (pg.23)

Whilst others found being offline problematic because they feared being socially excluded, missing out if they were not online or felt pressured to be online by peers. Here, the overlap with aspects of the '*Online Culture*' and '*Peer Context*' are evident.

Sadaf:...I deactivated it but went back because everyone was like "We can't talk to you because you're not on Facebook." (pg. 7)

3.11.2. '*Confronting*'

Some participants described confronting the perpetrator either online or face to face. Confronting was often an attempt to establish intent or motive, to clear potential misunderstandings or to convey that they did not feel intimidated. In circumstances whereby the participant suspected that the situation was a misunderstanding, confronting was considered useful to resolve the situation. Confronting was often described as being unsuccessful and potentially escalating the situation because "you just add fuel to the fire" (Jamal, pg.14). However, as Yvette explains below, participants felt that the possibility of confrontation gave them a sense of power, even if they chose not to do anything. Participant felt good communication skills was important to be able to confront and resolve interpersonal conflict. Therefore, one's '*Individual context*' in regards to their dis/abilities and education may overlap here.

Yvette: It just dragged it out, the back and forth of messages, but I did it because I didn't want her to think she could just get away with it but I guess that wasn't good. But knowing I could [answer her back] made me feel that I

could do something about it... you need to have the skills to be able to express yourself well if you do confront them otherwise it gets messy. (pg.21)

3.11.3. *“Brushing It Off”*

Participants described the strategy of “brushing it off” referring to their efforts to dismiss the cyber-act and minimise its effect. Participants seemed to take two approaches to brushing it off: ‘Discounting the perpetrator’ and ‘Putting it into perspective’.

3.11.3.1. ‘Discounting the perpetrator’

Participants reported discrediting the perpetrators actions by using humour to make it a joke because “it wasn’t worth taking seriously” (Karim, pg.14). If the perpetrator was not known to them they discounted their actions as “meaningless” (Aisha, pg.5). This strategy often involved focusing on the perpetrators negative characteristics such as “being immature” and having “nothing better to do” (Josh, pg.4), being “angry” or “a coward” (Jean pg. 7) for using social media to bully others. Therefore, this process was closely related to externalising the responsibility. Participant’s ability to “brush it off” was limited if the perpetrator was known to them or the act was highly exposing. Participants received support from peers to discount the perpetrator.

Marlon: Having someone to talk to made me realise it wasn’t true so I could just brush it off...if I knew them more personally maybe it would have been more difficult to ignore it. (pg.11)

3.11.3.2. ‘Putting it into perspective’

Participants spoke about putting their experience into perspective, seeing the cyber-act as “minor” [Mary, pg.8] in the grand scheme of their life. For some participants this involved adopting a future orientating focus by seeing the experience as temporary. Others compared the cyber-act experience to other difficult life

experiences making their cyber-act experience seem manageable. For example, Jean spoke about her experience of being a young carer and said “I can get through this because I have been through worse” (pg.20). In a similar way Mary spoke about experiencing a bereavement. Putting it into perspective was not intended to minimise the seriousness of the experiences rather it was a way of reassuring participants by helping them draw on their strengths and restore hope. Participants received support from people within their ‘*Peer & Family Context*’ to put their experience into perspective.

I: Thinking back, what do you think helped you during that time?

Mary: Um, I think it was my older sister. Cos she always told me you won’t know them in a year or five years time, it’s not the end of the world. And she didn’t laugh at me, she took it seriously but she was trying just to laugh it off, and show how irrelevant it really was. That made me feel better, like it’s okay, it’s gonna be ok, I can deal with it, it won’t last forever. (pg.14)

Most participants spoke about the benefits of being online and therefore, “*brushing it off*” was considered as worthwhile.

Josh: I thought there are too many good things online to give it up for someone like that. I thought it will pass soon, just ignore it. (pg.8)

Karim, Marlon and Ray seemed to connect “*brushing it off*” to their gender (‘*Individual Context*’). Their explanation for using this strategy resonated with wider discourses around hegemonic masculinity (‘*Socio-Political Context*’).

Karim: Be a man, like man-up...You gotta be tough....if you start whining then [friends] would be like what kind of man are you? (pg.17)

In this respect, *“brushing it off”* could have implications for responding in other ways, such as seeking help. In a similar vein, other participants spoke about *“brushing it off”* as a way of portraying a “tough” (Aisha, pg. 9) persona.

Aisha: You have to brush it off to show yourself as strong even if you are not feeling it...that’s how you have to survive online, it’s harsh. But you can’t let it in. (pg.9)

Used in this deflecting way, *“brushing it off”* could also be considered a barrier for emotional processing. As participants refuse to “let it in” (Aisha, pg. 9), they perhaps prevent the emotional impact to penetrate and be explored. For some participants, this seemed manageable and seemingly depended on nature of the cyber-act and the extent of its impact. However, others describe the emotional distress resurfacing and only being able to move forward once this has been processed. This processing is explained in the following subcategory; accepting.

Sadaf: I kept trying to push it down, ignore, shrug it off but I was still a bit upset about it, so yeah accept it, let it out and talk. (pg.13)

3.11.4. ‘Accepting’

This subcategory represents the ways participants accept the reality of their experience and process it by acknowledging rather than avoiding the emotional impact. This process may occur in gradual steps, where the individual vacillates between avoiding and accepting the emotional impact. Typically, acceptance follows the realisation that, despite one’s wishes to block out the experience, the situation and its impact has not disappeared. Accepting the situation and taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions, did not mean that participants deemed the cyber-act as acceptable but rather it is a realisation that one has control over one’s responses. Some participants described acceptance as the first steps to making use of other available strategies. In this way accepting the situation often prompted action.

'Accepting' can take many forms but usually involved some form of acknowledgment or outlet of emotional expression, such as recognising sadness, talking to others about one's feelings or creative arts or writing.

Sadaf: It got to the point where I had to accept that it happened, I got upset, I cried but I knew that there would be a limit and I knew I could try to stop it.
(pg.7)

Perceptions around the inevitability and universality of cyber-acts aided the participant in normalising and accepting the cyber-act. Some participants also spoke about how *'accepting'* made it easier to move on by focusing on positive aspects of life (as described in the subcategory *'Re-focusing'*) and ensuring it was no longer a focus of their attention (as described in the subcategory *"Brushing it off"*).

Josh: I just focused on more positive feedback than criticisms...I thought well it was bound to happen...I just accepted it and I am not the only person it happens to, it happens just move on. (pg.7)

3.11.5. *'Confiding in Others (Vs. Not Confiding)'*

Confiding in others represents participants reaching out for help both online and offline. All participants spoke about the importance of "knowing that [they] had support" (Marlon, pg. 20) in the form of good relationships where they could confide in a trusted other. Trusted others were identified as those who would not be judgemental and would understand, this was usually a peer or sibling. Social support helped participants feel more able to face the cyber-act. Some participant said they found it easier to confide in friends online because "it isn't face-to-face so it's less intense to talk about difficult things" (Ray, pg. 20).

Emily: Having someone to talk to about it, knowing someone is there that will listen, not judge you, and take it seriously, that is the most helpful thing".
(pg.22)

Several participants reported feeling reassured by listeners and supported to gain a better understanding of the experience. Several participants noted how, through talking about their experience, they began to understand other people's responsibility in the situation.

Yvette: By talking to my friends they would help me realise what was ok and not ok so I could actually speak out. (pg.16)

Most participants did not tell an adult, however, they spoke about adult involvement being necessary if it "reaches a certain point" (Ray, pg.18). This often referred to the need for an authority figure to stop the cyber-act and intervene to ensure their physical and emotional safety.

Aisha: Obviously if it gets worse, like more intense then get the police involved or get someone who can sort it out seriously, like legally, because that will actually scare off the person. (pg.11)

Participants whom confided in parents had anticipated support and understanding.

Marlon: ...because my mum always told me online has a dark side too but she knows you need to have it too...and we spoke about it before. So I knew when I told her that she would understand. (pg.18)

In connection with 'Accepted norms', perceptions of universality and inevitability amongst peers often deterred the participants from seeking help, particularly from adults. Participants spoke about a powerful discourse that you should "handle the situation by yourself" (Gloria, pg.17) within peer networks. They feared that they would be negatively judged by peers as a "snitch", they would "look weak" (Mary, pg. 26) or it would be embarrassing for people to know that they have been bullied. This highlights the stigma both around help-seeking and bullying. Participants worried that seeking-help would result in further damage to their self-concept or social status and put them at risk of social exclusion.

Emily: I'd rather just deal with it myself and no one else really has to know about it. It wouldn't be as embarrassing to have been bullied online sort of thing. (pg.19)

Participants spoke about wanting to avoid "blowing it out of proportion" (Nisha, pg.21) or to "draw attention" (Emily, pg.16) to themselves amongst peers. Participants did not trust that adults would understand, be able to stop it or intervene subtly, so they felt that it wasn't worth risking the situation escalating or becoming more public.

Yvette: I feel like some adults don't understand certain situations, and they won't be able to solve them completely...a lot of the time telling an adult makes it worse. (pg.19)

Participants anticipated that adults would be punitive which may make the situation worse. They also considered potential legal implications or spoke about their lack of understanding of the law which deterred them from disclosing to an adult. Some participants felt that legal implications were too stringent.

Nisha: I think that since it's become a criminal act it has actually made it harder to deal with it because if you're facing things that can affect you for the rest of your life, you're more likely to just be like, "Okay, I won't say anything and I won't get help. (pg.19)

Participants felt that parents did not appreciate the importance of SNS and feared being banned from using it.

Femi: I just didn't want her [mum] to ban me from social media...I thought maybe my mum would say I shouldn't have done this or maybe she just wouldn't understand. (pg.13)

Participants feared being judged or blamed for their actions or role in the cyber-act. In such instances, not disclosing was a way of self-protecting.

Nisha: People making you dwell on these things that you have done wrong ...it's just unhelpful, makes you feel more shitty about yourself, so I would rather not say anything. (pg.13)

Some participants anticipated dismissive attitudes from adults, particularly teachers. Participants assumed that teachers would think they were "overreacting or exaggerating" (Emily, pg.22) and just "little kids mucking about" (Jamal, pg.11).

Sadaf: It wasn't like you can go to a teacher, well it felt like you couldn't go [because] the teacher would be like, "What's wrong with you? it's silly", they wouldn't take me seriously. (pg.10)

Other participants spoke about how parents may take it “too seriously” (Aisha, pg. 10) and so they did not tell them to protect them from worry.

I: You spoke about not telling your parents, why was that?

Aisha: It would cause more stress for them, my mum obviously would have been really worried. (pg.10)

Participants also spoke about wanting to be self-reliant. It was important for them to feel they were able to deal with difficult experiences without relying on adults.

Aisha: you want to know you can do it alone, not always having to go to your parents. I tried to deal with it and then when that didn't work I told my boss... but I learned from doing it alone first. (pg.10)

3.11.6. *'Receiving Support'*

While the effects of *'Receiving Support'* shares commonality with *'Confiding in Others'*, it is thought to be distinct as the help is offered rather than actively sought. SNS was viewed as a useful platform to receive this type of unprompted support, because the cyber-acts were often visible to others enabling bystanders and peers to “defend” (Josh, pg. 7) or send supportive messages and posts. Some participants spoke about how this can discourage the perpetrator. Receiving support in this way made the participants feel “cared for” (Femi, pg. 16), which in turn helped them in rebuilding or preserving a positive self-concept.

Josh: People left positive comments and disagreed with the negative comments so I think it made that person look like a minority. I think some people may have posted positive comments to counteract it and be supportive which was nice. (pg.7)

3.11.7. 'Re-focusing'

Linked with "*Brushing it off*", participants decided to re-focus their attention to other things to combat the impact of the cyber-act. Participants spoke about distracting themselves, shifting priorities, working on self-improvement and focusing on the positive by engaging in activities and values in their life that made them feel good about themselves, gave them a sense of purpose and hope. This included religion, sports, creative art and spending time with friends and family. Participants found that being busy reduced unhelpful rumination and distress. For Femi, connecting to her religion (*'Individual Context'*) gave her hope. Jean and Gloria reflected on how art and writing helped them express, process as well as distract them from the cyber-act. Marlon spoke about how he took up rugby which helped him build confidence during a time when he felt "fragile" and "insecure" (Marlon, pg.11). Re-focusing and connecting with such activities helped participants in re-connecting or developing their sense of self.

Femi: ...my realisation of my relationship with God. I think it got to a point where I put my trust and energy in God and then knew that it would get better. (pg.22)

Jamal: you focus your attention on something that makes you feel good about yourself...you then build yourself up and the situation seems smaller. (pg.15)

There was no one way of managing, and different approaches were needed at different times. Participants described a continual process of re-evaluating their initial understanding of the experience which in turned effected their response. Participants spoke about variables that impacted the usefulness of a response such as how confident they were feeling and how much mental energy they had.

I: When is it harder to have that [brush it off] mentality?

Mary: Like when I was having like a bad day I guess, when life is full and you are stressed, those low self-esteem days can make it harder. (pg.16)

3.12. 'Allowing Time'

Participants spoke about '**Allowing Time**' to pass as a way of managing but also a means to bridge the making sense and responding phase to the final phase of the model. These two phases are not isolated they are co-occurring as '**Strategies for managing**' and '**Making sense of the experience**' are ways in which participants are re-building or sustaining their positive self-concept. The amount of time needed was different for each individual and depended on the cyber-act severity, degree of impact, the resources and strategies available to them. Participants referred to time as "a healer" (Marlon, pg.13) and spoke about "things [getting] better with time" (Emily, pg. 27). In this way, '**Allowing Time**' alongside the different strategies for managing was presented as the facilitating process to move forward.

3.13. 'Beyond the Cyber-act: (Re)building a Self-concept & Protective Shielding'

This category captures the process of (re)building a self-concept and learning from ones experience to facilitate the development of a protective shield. This involves moving to a position where participants describe feeling "stronger" (Marlon, pg.13) and more able to resist the impact of their negative experience and protect themselves from future ones. This process was described using similar analogies such as a "person with a shield" (Gloria, pg. 11), "having a filter" (Jean, pg.14), "having thicker skin" (Ray, pg.12) and "having a strong barrier" (Sadaf, pg.16), all of which depicted a strong image of a protective buffer. Two subcategories were constructed; '*Consolidating Learning*' and '*Defining self*'.

3.13.1. *'Consolidating Learning'*

Participants reflected on the valuable learning they gained from their experience. Their experience has taught them how the online world works, increased their awareness of themselves in relations to others and developed their ability to read “warning signs” and ways of “being on SNS” (Ray, pg.12). All participants emphasised that this learning was gained through facing the difficult experience. Participants described their experience as “pivotal” (Femi, pg. 8) and a “turning point” (Jamal, pg.17) for their development. Through re-framing their experience in this way they were able to see it as an opportunity for growth. Several participants used the metaphor of learning how to swim to illustrate how their learning is key to “surviving online” (Marlon, pg.14).

Femi: I feel like social media is like an ocean if you don't know how to swim, if you don't know how to move around certain topics, you're going to drown...through difficult experiences you really learn how to swim...

I: How exactly do people learn how to swim?

Femi: Well for me it was knowing myself and having an education about the diversity and what happens online, knowing what to do in difficult situations online...but you keep learning when things get hard... (pg.26)

Several participants spoke about wanting to share their learning by supporting others such as friends, younger siblings or by peer-mentoring. They also spoke about how they would have valued mentoring support themselves.

Jamal: I want to give back. Like now I mentor this young guy he was bullied online and I helped build him up. It makes me feel good to know I can help him...like when I was younger I wish I had someone who had been through it. (pg.18)

3.13.2. *'Defining Self'*

All participants made reference to the importance of “knowing who you are” (Gloria, pg.11) as perhaps the most crucial layer of the protective shield. Participants described defining themselves as a way of re-building or developing their self-concepts. For some this process was perceived as a recovery or re-connecting with their identities and strengths. Others spoke more about this process as a journey to learning who they are. Defining oneself was viewed as a powerful action of taking ownership of one’s narrative rather than allowing others to impose their narratives. This was a form of resistance to the cyber-act experience. In gaining a sense of who they are and who they want to be they were able to separate their thoughts and ideas from the perpetrators. This involved re-evaluating priorities, gaining a greater sense of their strengths and relationships. By doing this, participants described feeling in control and more assertive.

Gloria: What I have come to realise is that what people say doesn’t define you, it’s what you think of yourself. And of course if you don’t know yourself, you let these comments, you turn these comments into your own comments about yourself. It becomes the story about yourself. Rather than letting people define me, I decided I define myself. (pg.13)

Participants felt that age (*'Individual context'*), growing “older and wiser” (Emily, pg.19), re-focusing on activities of interest, having more life experiences, time and support from others supported this process. Participants also reflected on how their cyber-act experience affected their personal contexts. Some spoke about restoring trust in peers because of the support they received. Femi and Jamal spoke about how they felt more connected to aspects of their religion (*'Individual Context'*).

Jean: I think self-awareness, being with friends, doing stuff you love and having support. I think those are the most important things that help you get to know who you are...and that is what keeps me strong. (pg.31)

Jamal: My religion keeps me going, it keeps me staying strong with everything and when things are tough I get closer to my religion cos I think this is happening for a reason, for me to learn.(pg.12)

Some participants spoke about struggling to negotiate their self-concept in multiple realities (i.e. online and offline). Accepting the fluidity of one's identities and knowing one's core values seemed to help them with this process. Participants described defining themselves in multiple realities as continually experimenting, learning, evaluating and re-defining. This process reflects ideas of identity development.

Femi: I feel like it important to be true to who you are and to hold on to that. But it doesn't have to mean that is the only you or all of you, you don't need to show your whole self online...it is ok to change and you are constantly experiencing and learning so of course we will change...but if you lose touch with who you are, the core you, then it's hard to face the things people do and say online. (pg.27)

Therefore, the process of '*Consolidating Learning*' and '*Defining Self*' are in a circular dance; a constant shaping and re-shaping of a protective shield.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview

This chapter begins by relating the research findings to the research questions and literature. A critical review and reflexive account of the research follows. Finally, clinical and research implications are discussed.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

This study sought to explore how young people construct and face negative experiences on SNS. A model was developed from the qualitative data gathered: '(Re)building a self-concept and protective shielding'. The findings are discussed in relation to each research question with a focus on new findings.

4.2.1. Question 1: How do young people make sense of negative experiences on SNS?

Participants described a continual engagement in making sense of their experience throughout the process. Initially it involved identifying the act as a negative experience and making sense of causality. These processes will be discussed in this section. In subsequent sections, processes that involved assessing the situation to determine how to respond and creating meaning from the experience are discussed.

4.2.1.1. *What constitutes as a negative experience?*

In determining what constitutes as a negative experience, repetition and intentionality were first considered. Findings revealed that while repetition was commonly cited; many participants believed that the behaviour could constitute as a negative experience based on a single occurrence depending on its severity (Dredge *et al.*, 2014). Consistent with the literature; participants reported that establishing intent was more difficult on SNS, owing to the ambiguous communicative context (e.g. Nocentini *et al.*, 2010; Langos, 2012; Menensini & Nocentini, 2009).

Participants referred to the way mediated communication complicated the sense-

making process as it blurred boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Bryce & Fraser, 2013). A novel finding was that participants sought their peers' perspectives to establish intentionality. In such instances, participants felt that intentionality should be observable to others. Participants also reported using the repetition criterion as a way to differentiate between intentional and non-intentional acts (Menensini & Nocentini, 2009). All participants agreed that intentionality was an important indication that an act involves some form of aggression or is malicious, but emphasised that intentionality was a subjective notion and not easy to establish (Menesini *et al.*, 2012; Dredge *et al.*, 2014). Consistent with Dredge and colleagues' (2014) findings, participants made sense of their experience by considering the degree of impact. Therefore, despite intentionality and repetition being the most discernible indicators of a negative experience, the impact of the experience may be equally important. Participants particularly judged the extent of the impact on how damaging the act was to their self-concept and social status.

Many participants considered the experience as a negative experience because they simply lacked the ability to evade or stop it. This was often related to the power afforded to the perpetrator as a result of the cyber-context. For example, the perpetrator was controlling how the content online was managed. In this way, a power imbalance was formed. However, the construction of a power imbalance was based on the interaction between the perpetrators and the medium, rather than the relationship between the perpetrator and the participant. Interestingly, participants differentiated the aforementioned construction of power imbalance to how power would operate in a cyberbullying situation. All participants felt that 'cyberbullying' did not denote their experience accurately. Participants used the following factors to define 'cyberbullying': intent, high impact severity and a power imbalance in the target-perpetrator relationship. Therefore, participants' conceptualisation of 'cyberbullying' and a 'negative experience' did not match the current cyberbullying definition. These findings are consistent with previous research which highlights the discrepancy between the current definition of cyberbullying and the perception of adolescents (Dredge *et al.*, 2014)

Instead of using 'cyberbullying' language, terms such as 'rumours', 'hate', 'harassment', 'drama' and occasionally 'bullying online' were used. It seemed that the majority of participants rejected the term cyberbullying due to the disempowering connotation it conjured up. Participants described that the term cyberbullying connoted a victim-bully relationship which positioned the target as powerless and defenceless. Participants did not view themselves nor did they wish to be perceived as 'victims', which suggests that the term holds a stigma. Researchers have speculated that the term cyberbullying and its association with victimisation may not be useful nor desirable to young people (e.g. Griggs, 2010; Nixon, 2010) and these findings support this concern. However, the evidence and reasons for this assumption is less documented in current literature; making these findings significant. Given, the current findings, the term cyber-aggression may be better placed to reflect the experiences of the young people in this study. The term is arguably more appropriate as it shifts the focus to the perpetrator, rather than positioning the target as a victim.

4.2.1.2. Making sense of causality

Most initial explanations of causality focused on the self and the participant's engagement in risky internet activities (e.g. sharing personal information). However, participants described a shift away from the individual to consider wider contextual factors and the actions of the perpetrator.

Causality was attributed to the online context. Participants perceived that SNS users generally feel less restrained and less empathic because of the sense of disconnection online, which in turn encourages aggressive behaviour towards others (Espelage *et al.*, 2012). Their description were consistent with the online disinhibition effect theory (Suler, 2004).

Other participants suggested that cyber-aggression was guided by social norms regarding the universality and inevitability of such behaviour rather than by personal codes of morality. This fits with the Espelage and colleagues' (2012) application of

the social norm theory (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986). They assert that norms that encourage a normative perspective of cyberbullying may mislead young people to consider cyberbullying as more acceptable than it actually is, and consequently may result in increased perpetration (Espelage *et al.*, 2012). In a similar way, negative experiences were also understood within the context of social practices online. Consistent with previous research, participants described the various forms of social comparisons and competition on SNS which tend to result in feelings of jealousy or dissatisfaction (Fox & Moreland, 2015). Participants suggested that these feelings, and a general desire to build and consolidate one's social status instigates acts of cyber-aggression. Participants showed an awareness that much of this behaviour, particularly social comparisons, was influenced by consumerism and a materialistic culture which permeates their everyday online experiences (Chapman & Buchanan, 2012).

Other participants conceptualised their negative experiences as discriminatory acts on the basis of markers of difference, such as racism. Participants understood the causes of their experience to stem from discriminatory discourses that exist within our society and are amplified on SNS. For example, one participant made reference to Islamophobia in relation to current social-political issues such as hate crime. Participants felt they were more likely to be subjected to discrimination online because of disinhibition. In concert with these findings, other studies have found that belonging to a marginalised group is associated with cyber-victimisation (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011). These findings concur with Walton's (2005) argument that bullying is a social and political construction, rooted in ideological relations of power and broader levels social oppression. In the UK increasing rates of hate crime offences online (Corcoran & Smith, 2016) indicate that discriminatory acts are prevalent. Given these findings it seems plausible to argue that markers of difference and cyberbullying may warrant further research in our current political climate.

4.2.2. Question 2: What influences the impact of young people's negative experiences on SNS?

Participants discussed mediating factors in the context of risk factors, strategies for managing and resilience factors. Risk factors will be the focus of this section.

As found in previous studies, the impact severity was mediated by distinct contextual factors and the frequency, duration and severity of the malicious acts (Tokunaga, 2010). The proliferation of SNS platforms and 24 hour access contributed to the impact severity. Also, acts that occurred offline, in addition to online, was perceived to be one of the worst circumstances, as it reduced the opportunities for respite. Participants described how victimisation that occurred more frequently diminished their sense of hope that it would or could end, this had significant implications for managing the experience.

Consistent with previous research; an act that occurred publically amplified the impact severity (Dredge *et al.*, 2014). Publicity increased feelings of embarrassment and the risk that the participant's reputation would be damaged (Bryce & Fraser, 2013). Publicity was also related to an increased likelihood for multiple perpetrators and an unhelpful response from bystanders. The impact severity was exacerbated further if highly exposing material was shared publicly.

Previous research suggests that young people perceive anonymous harassment to have serious impacts on the target (Bryce & Fraser 2013; Vandelbosch & Van Cleemput; 2008) and evidence of this can be found in this study. Anonymous harassment seemed to increase a sense of mistrust; as participants worried about the perpetrator's identity. However, while previous research (Dredge *et al.*, 2014) has shown that both knowing and not knowing the perpetrator increases the impact severity, the findings of this study suggests a known perpetrator was of greater threat. One explanation for this, is that participants conceptualised an act committed by a peer as a personal attack, with a clear intent to bruise their self-concept and sabotage their reputation. Also, a known perpetrator posed more risk to their close peer relationships and carried an increased likelihood that acts would also occur

offline. These consequences intensified the sense that there was no safe haven, and potentially limited social support. It seems important to consider young people's tenuous developmental stage to understand this effect on the impact severity. Any form of tarnishing to one's self-concept, online identity and social network is considered one of the most worrying impacts of a negative experience online. This is unsurprising given that early and middle adolescence is characterised by an increased focus on the self and peer-acceptance (Erikson, 1968) and SNS is most commonly used to preserve and strengthen peer relationships (Boyd, 2014).

Participants consistently reported that impact severity was mediated by how much control they had over the medium. Consistent with Dredge and colleagues' (2014) findings participants voiced feelings of helplessness and hopelessness if they were unable to remove distressing material off SNS. Dredge and colleagues (2014) also suggested that normative perceptions and beliefs about the universality of cyberbullying acted as protective factors. Similar findings have been highlighted in this study; many participants spoke about the inevitability and universality of cyberbullying. For some the notion seemed to reduce the severity impact as it helped to normalise the experience, allowing the situation to feel more manageable. However, other participants spoke such beliefs as endorsing cyberbullying as an accepted norm that young people must tolerate. Consequently, this could interfere with them seeking social support and in turn hindering their ability to manage. Therefore, this novel finding suggests that such perceptions do not have a uniform impact on the dynamics of the experience.

The role of the bystander and peers was influential on all aspects of the experience. In terms of impact severity, participants described how the impact was often exacerbated when bystanders became involved. Participants anticipated that most bystanders would encourage the perpetrator or simply not intervene. The inaction of a bystander was also seen to amplify the impact, as the absence of support increased feelings of loneliness and further diminished a positive self-concept. The importance of reliable bystanders to buffer against negative impacts has been found by previous research (Ortega *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, if peers encouraged

blaming attitudes this significantly exacerbated the negative impact and encouraged internal victimising.

4.2.3. Question 3: How do young people deal with negative experiences and what helps or hinders this process?

One important contribution of this study was identifying strategies (e.g. 'Accepting', "Brushing it off" and 'Re-focusing') that have not been well documented in cyberbullying literature.

'Accepting' denoted the way participants accepted the reality of their experience and processed it; confronting their feelings rather than avoiding the emotional impact. Parris and colleagues (2012) also describe a strategy termed 'acceptance' in which participants recognised that cyberbullying was a part of life. Similarly, participants described that their beliefs about the universality and inevitability of negative experiences on SNS facilitated the 'accepting' process. However, despite the similarity in the language, the current findings emphasised acceptance as a process of connecting with the emotional experience and realising that one has control over one's response. This seemed to be a powerful way of re-gaining a sense of control over one's actions.

In connection with acceptance, participants described the strategy of "brushing it off". This denoted a process of cognitively reframing the negative experience as unimportant in the grand scheme of life, and discrediting the perpetrators action or comments. This finding is broadly consistent with Parris and colleagues (2012) who describe a strategy called 'justification'; in which young people determine reasons why cyberbullying should not bother them. The "brushing it off" approach differs slightly, however, as the intention seems to centre on helping the participants to restore hope, draw on resilience and strengthen self-reassurance. Also, participants described that without acceptance "brushing it off" may only serve as a deflecting mechanism with the risk that emotional distress will re-surface. Interestingly, it seemed that gender and social norms also influences the use of this strategy. Male

participants seemed to relate “brushing it off” to hegemonic masculinity; viewing it as the “manly” thing to do. Other participants seemed to connect this strategy to accepted norms; namely that young people need to be “tough” online and tolerate these experiences. Therefore, this strategy may serve to sustain an acceptable social identity. This raises further questions regarding why this strategy is utilised; is it viewed as an obligation, a choice or as self-protection.

Another important finding, was regarding how participants spent their time. The strategy ‘re-focusing’ represented the way participants turned their attention and time to activities of interest. This seemed to be a particularly useful strategy in re-building their self-concept, and the mere act of keeping busy helped buffer against impact severity. Therefore, this process was both reactive and preventative. By re-focusing participants seemed to re-connect with a sense of meaning in their life, belonging and a valued role. These were identified as important facets of managing, which are currently neglected in the literature.

Other ways of managing included using technical strategies, confronting the perpetrator and seeking social support which are widely reported in the current literature (Tokunaga, 2010). Confronting the perpetrator was only considered useful if participants speculated that there might be a misunderstanding or intent was unclear. Consistent with other studies (e.g. Parris *et al.*, 2012) many participants warned against confronting because it often escalated the attack. However, a novel finding was that participants suggested that merely knowing that they could respond, if needed, instilled a sense of power and control, which helped them manage the situation. This again highlights the significance of perceived power differentials. It also suggests that an individual’s confidence in their communicative and social capability is important.

Social support was identified as one of the leading factors in helping participants to deal with and mitigate the impact of negative experiences online (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011). Consistent with the literature, most participants turned to their peers or

siblings for support rather than adults (Slonje et al., 2013; Tokunaga, 2010). Participants described a preference for being self-reliant and to self-govern; making use of their resources without involving adults. It seemed that if adults intervened then the responsibility for the intervention was no longer in the young person's control or based on their own abilities to manage. Most participants described a self-awareness of their abilities; knowing when to involve an adult. In such instances, having a trusted adult, who was supportive and non-judgmental was essential. This is consistent with research (Wang *et al.*, 2012) that suggests young people want adults to appreciate their self-governance on SNS, but also be available for support when needed. This is unsurprising given that developmentally adolescents are likely to want to broaden their independent experiences (Erikson, 1968). Participants experienced adult involvement as punitive and they viewed zero tolerance policies and increasing surveillance as unhelpful and ineffective. They also felt that legal implications were ambiguous, which consequently deterred them from disclosing to adults. While research (e.g. Paul *et al.*, 2013) shows that young people are not well informed about legislative information, the implications of this has been less documented. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the current interventions available which largely endorse greater censorship and punitive action (Wang *et al.*, 2012). Many of the reasons given to why young people do not seek support from adults were similar to previous findings (e.g. Sleglova & Cerna, 2011; Mishna *et al.*, 2009) and are explained in detail in the Analysis Chapter. An interesting finding was that some participants were concerned that adults will overreact (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) whilst other participants anticipated that adults would not take them seriously, both were viewed as equally hindering.

The availability of adult support, their attitudes, and feedback evidently plays a key role. It seems that adults need to strike the right balance between reacting supportively and not over-reacting or being punitive. This resonates with Garcia Preto's (1999) idea of "nurturance without the fuss" (cited in Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, p. 279). She speaks of the delicate balance adolescents require from adults, whereby they permit autonomy whilst remaining present, enforcing boundaries and being available for support where needed.

Participants also spoke about discouraging peer attitudes and perception of help-seeking. They referred to a peer culture that humiliates and negatively judges those who seek help from adults. In such instances, participants' wish to maintain peer approval and reputation was assumed to be of greater importance over adult support. These findings are consistent with extensive literature on traditional bullying and discouraging discourses amongst peers regarding help-seeking behaviours, which are especially common among adolescent males (e.g. Naylor, Cowie, & del Rey, 2001). In a similar vein, research on cyberbullying also suggests boys are less likely to seek social support (Kowalksi *et al.*, 2014). In this study, interestingly, the only two participants who did not actively seek help were male, both of whom made reference to needing to "man up". The concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) may be helpful in interpreting these findings. Such widely held discourses about masculinity are often found to intersect with help-seeking behaviours, and supporting evidence for this can be found in the bullying literature. (e.g. Trickett, 2009).

While several ways of managing have been reviewed and compared with previous research, this study demonstrates that managing the negative experiences is a dynamic process. Different ways of managing were needed, or were more useful at different times, and this was dependent on the context, and the role and perception of others. In the Analysis Chapter, the cognitive processes involved in selecting different strategies are explained in detail demonstrating how a participant's perception of the situation impacted on the subsequent actions. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) distinction between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies is perhaps discernible in participants' varied approaches to managing. However, in agreement with other researchers (e.g. Parris *et al.*, 2012) the dichotomous categorising is limited. Arguably any type of categorising is redundant, as different ways of managing were constructed to have multiple functions. For example, avoiding the experience through "brushing it off" was also a way to stop the cyber-act through a lack of reaction, as well as a way of managing the emotional effects.

4.2.4. Question 4: How do young people maintain resilience when faced with negative experiences online?

4.2.4.1. *Social resources*

Social resources pertain to positive aspects of social relationships and networks, such as identity, belonging and emotional support. Consistent with previous research (e.g. Przybylski *et al.*, 2014; Papatraianoua *et al.*, 2014), having a supportive social network and a sense of belonging were crucial aspects of resilience. Supportive relationships, whether with family or friends, appeared to counter feelings of hopelessness, and provide recognition for positive qualities that supported participants' self-esteem. Some participants spoke about the benefits of connecting with peers who had similar experiences and/or advocated for peer support as an intervention.

Consistent with White's (2004) conceptualisation of resilience, participants described connecting with preferred aspects of their identities. This involved performing valued roles or re-focusing on meaningful practices as well as reconnecting with strengths. Participants described this process as taking ownership and control of defining themselves. This was particularly pertinent considering that many participants felt their self-concept had been knocked. Re-building their self-concept, and connecting with preferred aspects of their identities was intrapersonal, as these identities were reinforced and supported by those around them. The process appeared to facilitate resilience and their ability to resist negative narratives imposed by the perpetrators and others around them (e.g. unsupportive peers).

4.2.4.2. *Cultural resources*

Cultural resources are belief systems and knowledge associated with a certain cultural background. A few participants referred to cultural resources such as religion. Religion was described as offering reassurance, patience and hope, and a means of claiming agency over the present and future. Religious activities were also deemed important to manage emotions and construct valued selves. Some drew on

their religious belief as a way of making positive meanings of their experience. Thus, participants' belief systems were described not only as facilitating resilience but also positive growth.

4.2.4.3. Individual resources

Control and personal agency were important interrelated facets of maintaining resilience. Control was conceptualised as both a sense of control and actual control over the situation. In response to feeling unable to exert control to stop or influence the behaviour of the perpetrator, participants seemed to turn their attention to ways of managing that helped them re-gain control either over the situation, or other aspects of their lives. Through opportunities to exert a sense of agency and develop a sense of mastery, either directly related to the experience, or in other areas of their lives participants felt more able to maintain resilience. This is consistent with Prilleltensky and colleagues' (2001) view that self-efficacy alongside personal control, can serve as a protective factor for young people facing adversity.

Another personal resources was optimism. Participants spoke about their determination to hold on to hope. The benefits of using SNS also presented as a reason to persevere. This is broadly consistent with Przybylski and colleagues' (2014) finding that young people who had 'digital optimism' were more likely to demonstrate resilience.

Participants seemed to contest the term "victim" and instead gave preference to viewing themselves as a 'target'. Language was a useful tool to help the young people connect with their preferred identities and self-narrative. Identifying themselves as a 'target' seemed to instil empowerment, a sense of power and highlighted their agency in negotiating their identity in relation to their experience.

Finally, participants also spoke about the importance of having good communicative skills online to be able to respond to interpersonal conflict. Having such skills seemed to help the participants feel more confident and assertive.

4.2.4.4. Personal growth

Participants described that although their negative experiences were unfortunate occurrences, they were also pivotal life experiences which were crucial for building resilience online. By facing difficult experiences online they had the opportunity to strengthen different ways of managing and developing self-awareness. Therefore, resilience was viewed as a continual process involving the consolidation of their learning into preventative mechanisms. This is consistent with research, showing that resilience is not supported by excessively sheltering of young people from challenging situations (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). For some the capacity to re-frame their negative experience appeared to enable participants to make positive meaning of it. Hence, participants made sense of their experience as an opportunity for growth and learning for positive change.

While, several risk factors, protective factors and ways of managing have been compared to previous research, the basis of this study demonstrates that difficult experiences on SNS surpass the mere execution of any particular coping strategy. Instead, having valued roles, a sense of purpose and belonging and being occupied in life were crucial qualities of participants' lives that they perceived as ways of maintaining resilience. These findings can broaden our thinking about how young people respond to negative online experiences, and extend our thinking to the overall context of a young person's life.

4.3. Critical Review

Yardley's (2000) and Charmaz's (2014) evaluative criteria was consulted throughout this process.

4.3.1. Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2000) advocates sensitivity to theoretical and empirical context of research. One aspect is sensitivity to the data itself. As recommended by Charmaz (2014), a thorough literature review was delayed until after the analysis was completed to minimise the influence of existing theoretical knowledge and enabling analysis to keep as close to the data as possible. Delaying the literature review is a unique feature of GT, and Yardley (2000) does not necessarily recommend it. Yardley's (2000) recommends that having an extensive grounding in the existing literature allows greater sensitivity to the context. Having previously completed a research proposal, the research was guided with an awareness of the relevant arguments to the topic, enabling the study to be situated within relevant literature. Therefore, it was also important to remain reflexive about where my ideas were coming from and I used this position of knowledge as a form of theoretical sensitivity. Sensitivity to the data is also demonstrated; through evidencing theoretical categories with quotations, and writing comprehensive explanations of categories in the Analysis Chapter. Using vivo coding and actively seeking negative cases (within the original dataset), I also ensured that the model stayed close to the data. For example, the varied strategies for managing in the model reflects sensitivity to differences in the data.

Another aspect of sensitivity to context is how the socio-cultural setting of research influences the researcher and participants, and their relationship. I was mindful of the sensitivity of the topics that were discussed, the artificiality of an 'interview' conversation, and how the inherent differences and power between myself and the young people would influence the research. As discussed in the Methodology Chapter, I remained attuned to differences and power, and ensured to utilise my interpersonal style to minimise the sense of authority. I remained sensitive to how social media use amongst young people is thought about in the social context to consider how I might be received by the participants. I became aware that participants felt that adults did not understand the importance of SNS. Therefore, I openly acknowledged and spoke about these differences of not growing up with social media; to explain why I was interested in hearing their views and why their lived experiences were valuable. I also turned to the Youth Research Consultants to

discuss how my own personal context might influence how I interpreted the data. Participants also spoke about their own contexts and I remained curious this during interviews. This is reflected in the model which clearly integrates the different influences across different level of contexts.

4.3.2. Commitment and Rigour

This standard refers to the researcher's level of engagement with the research and commitment to the method of analysis. Memo-writing aided in constructing and justifying the codes and categories, and the links between them. This enabled me to reflect on the use of the methods and be cognizant of the development of my GT research skills. In order to keep close to data, I used line-by-line coding and vivo codes. I looked for diversity between and within participant experiences by engaging in comparative analysis. Commitments to the method were made by carrying out initial analysis and model development between waves of interviews. However, this was constrained by time-limits and some aspects of GT were not possible, such as theoretical sampling. Consequently, this study may be best conceptualised as an “abbreviated version” of GT. I also drew on guidance from my research supervisor who has experience using GT. I worked with an academic tutor with GT expertise, and Clinical Psychology doctorate trainees using GT for their theses. Group sessions involved coding independently, and then collectively for credibility checks, and developing knowledge and analytic skills. See Appendix sixteen for a memo describing and reflecting on a group session.

4.3.3. Transparency and Coherence

This criteria refers to the clarity of the argument presented, the transparency and consistency between the aims, methodology and method. The processes of data collection have been described in detail in the Methodology Chapter to adhere to transparency. Internal coherence is demonstrated in the consistency between the research questions, the critical realist epistemological position adopted and the rationale for using GT. The appendices present documentation of the data collection,

analysis process and extracts from interviews were given throughout the Analysis Chapter.

4.3.4. Impact and Importance

This principle refers to the need for research to advance understanding about a topic and ensure utility (Yardley, 2000). The clinical and research implications are outlined in following sections, and reflect the practical and theoretical contributions. Clinical implications will be disseminated to the recruitment sites via a presentation.

4.3.5. Researcher Reflexivity

I have used reflective journals and memos to support my reflexivity. Here, I will consider epistemological reflexivity and personal reflexivity (Willig, 2001). My intention is to contextualise my position and the construction of this research.

4.3.5.1. *Epistemological position*

A critical realist position was chosen as it was deemed to be in accordance and appropriate to the type of knowledge the research question sought to provide. However, by adopting this position there are limits to the data. From this position, I considered multiple interpretations (i.e. participant's accounts) of a single reality. From a social constructionism position the data would have been considered as one of multiple realities of what might be occurring. From this lens, a discourse analysis method could have been used to consider the assumptions underpinning language; to construct a negative experience online and the influence of power on what can and cannot be said. The influence of language was evident in the participant's description, such as the impact of the 'victim' discourse. A social constructionism stance would have given valuable attention to this.

4.3.5.2. Personal reflexivity

I was aware that as an adult and a Trainee Clinical Psychologist, there were inherent power differences between myself and participants. I was conscious that young people might not feel empowered to challenge the questions or say certain things and this may have limited the data. I became aware of participants comments about the stigma surrounding cyberbullying, particularly perceptions of weakness associated with this experience. This made me wonder how mental health problems are also stigmatised with similar discourses and how my profession was likely to be associated with mental health. I was conscious that young people may have heightened sensitivities about self-image and social evaluation, and may not wish to appear weak through the accounts they shared. I was particularly aware of this when interacting with male participants. As a young female I was conscious of wider societal discourses about masculinity and the 'stoic male'. I wondered how this may have influenced what male participants felt was possible to talk about.

Owing to my own experience of discrimination based on ethnicity, I was particularly aware that I was drawn to ideas about social oppression and how this is enacted in cyberspace. It seemed important to reflect on how this influenced my interpretation of the data.

A few participants mentioned that it was the first time telling an adult about their experience. I was conscious that the interview was not a therapy session, yet had some therapeutic essence, given the sensitive topic discussed and my professional role. I reflected on the ways my interaction with participants may differ had it been a therapy session. This made me connect with the systemic ideas, such as the way questions can act as interventions (Dallos & Stedman, 2006) which helped me try to pose questions in a supporting way.

4.4. Study's Limitations

All participants spoke about retrospective experiences, ranging from years to a few months prior to the interview. Whilst, this may have positioned them in a safer and more reflective place to talk about their experiences, the time context is important given rapid changes with SNS. Furthermore, time as a feature of the model suggests that relying on retrospective recalls will also have influenced the findings.

Developmental processes and life experiences of participants, inevitably affected the ways in which past experiences were perceived during the interview. It is possible that providing a timeframe during recruitment may have been useful (e.g. in the last six months). However, from a constructivist position of GT, the model does not claim to offer an exact picture but rather an interpretive portrayal of the phenomenon studied (Charmaz, 2014).

Participants in this study self-selected to take part and it is possible that they may have been more highly motivated to discuss their experiences. The study also focused on the perceptions of students attending inner London sixth form colleges, all of whom were studying A-levels. This may mean that the overall sample represents a particular sub-set of young people. More females took part in the study and the sample was not diverse in terms of other demographics, such as sexual orientation, religion and disability. Socioeconomic status was not recorded. Therefore, analysis of markers of difference in experience was tentative or not possible. Future research may seek information from a broader range of settings and samples to engage in a comparison of experience and perceptions and investigate intersectional effects. That said, efforts were made to recruit from different London areas to promote heterogeneity. The model is also based on a small sample, which limits the findings' transferability. However, again consistent with my constructivist critical realist perspective, this study did not aim to represent the views of all young people. Instead the model offers a contextualised exploration from a sample of young people from London.

4.5. Research Implications

This study indicates several factors that support resilience online, an area which has been largely neglected in the field. Further research to build on the ideas of resilience that have been constructed in this study is warranted.

This study also suggests that there is a discrepancy between how researchers and young people conceptualise cyberbullying. Such a discrepancy will continue to have an impact on the measurement of cyberbullying as research is most likely excluding individuals who do not understand their experience as it is currently defined. This study's finding can support an accurate bottom-up definition. However, it also advocates the need to steer away from whether an experience fits into specific definitional criteria, to an understanding of the dynamics of the experience. Additionally, the findings suggests revision regarding the usefulness of the term. The research field would benefit from working alongside young people as co-researchers in this endeavour. This study has benefitted from the support of Young People Consultants, however, moving towards participatory-action research is a feasible approach. Young people's input to guide the development of a co-construction of meaning is particularly relevant.

A challenge for future research is to examine how young people can be encouraged to report cyberbullying, and what support, including online support, young people need and want. Focusing particularly on how adults and services may support adolescents in the development of self-governance, and skills to negotiate negative experiences online may be particularly useful. There are greater and more imperative opportunities for bystander interventions, and research on strategies to encourage bystander action is important, given that they may feel less inclined to intervene.

4.6. Clinical Implications

4.6.1. Individual and Service level

The following implications can be considered for all services that serve young people, including CAMHS, schools/colleges and youth centres.

4.6.1.1. *Language*

The findings suggest that the word cyberbullying may not be useful nor desirable for young people, and therefore professionals should be guided by young people's language. Language used in dissemination of information such as leaflets or information online should be reviewed. As suggested the term cyber-aggression maybe a useful alternative, however, services need to gain a bottom up understanding of the language that is acceptable and useful for young people. For CAMHS, service-user involvement initiatives may be a useful venue for such discussions.

4.6.1.2. *Therapeutic interventions*

Connecting and preserving preferred aspects of one's identities was key to maintaining resilience online. This lends support to therapies that centralise the concept of identity, such as Narrative Therapy (NT) (White & Epston, 1990). NT seeks to help people identify their values and abilities and create stories about identity that are helpful to them. Emphasis is placed on redevelopment and reinvigoration of a 'sense of self', which resembles how participants spoke about defining themselves. NT also represents a social justice approach, seeking to challenge dominant discourses that shape people's lives in unhelpful ways. In the context of cyberbullying this may be helpful as some experiences were related to wider societal issues. NT, therefore, could respond to stories of individual difficulties as well as encouraging social action making it both reactive and preventative. Collective narrative practice (Denborough, 2008) may be particularly useful as it

brings people with similar experiences together which would create opportunities for peer support.

An alternative psychological approach is Compassion Focused Therapy principles which focus on increasing capacity for compassion for self and others. Compassion-based initiatives have been implemented in schools as preventative mental health interventions (e.g. Lee-Potter, 2015). This approach may be useful in addressing the risk of internal victimising (e.g. self-blaming) as well as general concerns about the lack of empathy on SNS.

Participants also spoke about the importance of engaging in meaningful activities. This lends support to approaches that incorporate behavioural activation such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes, 2005). ACT also encourages acceptance of the inevitability of distressing experiences arising; and puts the focus on changing one's relationship to distressing thoughts, images and feelings. This resonates with the participant's ideas around acceptance.

Collaborative working with the young people's network seems imperative. All participants cited their good relationships in buffering against negative impacts and maintaining resilience. However, negotiation about how to involve others needs to be carefully considered with young people; as participants also spoke about the importance of self-governance. If a young person has a limited social network, emphasis may need to be placed on building social support.

This study suggests young people are unlikely to look to adults for support and therefore, it is important to take a proactive approach. Showing interest and exploring young people's use of SNS may need to be a routine part of practice for professionals. Furthermore, more accessible venues for support may need to be considered such as cyberspace. This may be particularly useful given that some

participants mentioned finding it easier to discuss sensitive issues online in the absence of face-to-face contact.

4.6.2. Implications for Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians may benefit from educational resources and workshops to improve their understanding of SNS, and how to discuss cyberbullying and related risks without enforcing excessive restrictions and punitive approaches. The aim is to help parents/guardians support children to develop the capacity to make effective choices for themselves online; whilst ensuring that they know parents/guardians are available and supportive when needed. This will be best achieved by creating such resources in collaboration with young people and working closely with schools.

4.6.3. Implications for Schools/Colleges

Clear and consistent policy and practices related to cyberbullying sends a strong message to students about the school's commitment to sustain a safe and supportive environment and that support is readily available. It would also provide the school with a framework to guide adult's actions for prevention and early intervention. It is advisable to have an assigned staff member who is trained and knowledgeable about wider legislation, and such policies need to be communicated to students. It is important that students feel that adults would respond appropriately by taking their concerns seriously, validating the emotional impact and developing a collaborative intervention with the young person rather than using punitive approaches. A whole-school approach would benefit from the following aspects:

- Supporting young people to develop positive attitudes to cyberspace and good 'digital citizenship' skills.
- Educating young people on their and others' rights and responsibilities online and the law. This could include projects alongside the police, for example, making videos about legal implications and facilitating dialogues between police and young people to enable exchange of advice.

- A focus on bystander interventions as people often found it helpful when others offered support. This may involve discussion and education about how to notice, intervene and report cyberbullying and what support they can expect.
- Peer led initiatives to help young people recognise cyberbullying.
- Developing young people's social skills and support to resolve and negotiate relationship conflicts.
- Content on specific technical skills, including how to contact Internet Service Providers.
- Challenging stigma around help-seeking and normative perceptions which can perpetuate cyberbullying.
- Engaging adolescents in discussions about current socio-political issues and how these present online.
- Setting up peer support particularly involving those who have had an experience of cyberbullying as peer mentors.
- Participation in extracurricular activities and voluntary work are important ways to support connectedness, social support and give young people opportunities to develop skills that are key for resilience.
- Individual support needs to be sensitive to the importance and status of the relationship in which cyberbullying occurs.
- Improving staff knowledge of cyberbullying, anti-bullying programmes and practices.

School interventions and policies should be co-constructed and co-facilitated with young people. In this process, young people as 'experts' training and supporting adults to understand SNS, and their social practices, may create opportunities for mutual exchanges of information.

4.6.4. Policy and Societal Level

Cyberbullying raises several legal challenges, and the need for legal advice and partnerships with local police would be beneficial for all stakeholders. Given that

cyberbullying is primarily a relational issue, a reliance on legal sanctions to deal with cyberbullying may be largely ineffective.

The media industry can support through increasing appropriate technical tools to give users greater control. Through education, media companies could enhance anti-cyberbullying efforts by keeping stakeholders up-to-date on changing technologies, increasing their awareness of online prevention, intervention strategies, and guiding them on how to promote positive use of social media.

Public anxieties about the detrimental outcomes of cyberbullying publicised in the media, have tended to blame technology when this behaviour is also influenced by many factors, as this study indicates. Such media portrayals focus the narrative on online risks, whilst ignoring the socio-political context in which this occurs and how broader cultural practices shape online practices. Government policy and society as a whole must aim to address wider societal issues affecting young people.

Providing opportunities for young people to successfully advocate for, participate in, and drive social change, such as involvement in the creation and delivery of anti-cyberbullying approaches and policies is empowering. This type of contribution is essential to support adults in reaching a consensus understanding of what this experience means to young people and how they want to be supported.

4.7. Conclusion

This study set out to use grounded theory methodology to explore young people's negative experiences on SNS. The model '(re)building self-concept and protective shielding' situates young people's experience within the individual, online, social and political context. It describes the processes occurring as young people make sense of, respond to and move beyond a negative experience online. From being targeted and experiencing an attack on their self-concept, young people respond in a number

of ways to build themselves up and resist the negative impact of the experience. Through this learning and reciprocal process they develop protective ways of being on SNS. Therefore, the model poses one way of conceptualising how young people recover and maintain resilience in the face of negative online experiences. The findings show that young people are able to rise from negative experiences on SNS and experience personal growth, often with little support from adults. Resources across social, cultural and individual levels of context can support this process. However, there are also many factors that can hinder this process including a cyber-context that can blur the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, punitive interventions and unsupportive peers and bystanders. Normative perceptions and discourses of cyberbullying which perpetuate such behaviours can also further hinder this process of recovery.

This study has moved beyond the traditional domains of how cyberbullying has been previously researched, by taking a process based approach to understanding resilience and the risk and protective factors involved when young people face such issues. The study's findings encourage us to move away from viewing young people as merely vulnerable users of SNS. Instead, we need to appreciate and give attention to both the vulnerabilities and resilience that young people experience and talk of. The study's findings suggest that difficult experiences on SNS surpass the mere execution of any particular coping strategy. It calls for us to broaden our thinking about how young people manage in the face of such experiences and how we can support them in this process. Above all, the findings stress that if we are to effectively tackle cyberbullying and related issues we must work alongside young people to learn from their resilience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature Search Strategy

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Appendix 1: Literature Search Strategy

To conduct the literature review I used several databases including: Academic Search Complete, CINAHL Plus, Psycarticles, Psycinfo, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Education Research Complete. These databases were sought through EBSCO, an international online database resource. I also used SCOPUS, Cyberpsychology database as well as Google Scholar. The following search terms were used: 'cyberbullying' OR 'cyber-aggression' OR 'online bullying' AND 'child and adolescents'. Once I had explored social media and cyberbullying research generally, I focussed on the specifics of my research. I conducted searches including the above search terms AND 'social networking sites' AND 'victimisation', AND 'coping', AND 'Mental health', AND 'policy'. I read abstracts and downloaded and saved full articles which appeared relevant. Relevant papers were identified through title and abstract reviews and were included if there was a focus on child and adolescents. Searches were initially limited to the period 2000-2017 but snowball searches were conducted through the reference lists of relevant papers in order to identify other relevant papers. These follow-up searches sought to identify key papers outside this time period and other relevant studies, for example on face to face bullying. Grey literature (e.g. newspaper articles, policy documents and electronic data from websites) were searched via google search.

Appendix 2: Definition of Social Networking Sites

“a networked communication platform in which participants (1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others, and (3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site” (Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 158).

Appendix 3: Types of Cyberbullying

Willard's (2006) categorisation of types of cyberbullying act include:

- Flaming - sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed privately or publically
- Harassment - repeated sending of nasty, insulting or offensive messages
- Cyberstalking - harassment that include threats of harm or is highly intimidating.
- Denigration - sending or posting harmful, untrue, or cruel statements about a person.
- Impersonation - pretending to be someone else online and sending or posting material.
- Outing - sharing secrets or humiliating information of another person.
- Trickery - convincing someone to share humiliating information, then making the information public.
- Exclusion - actions that specifically and intentionally exclude a person from an online group.

Appendix 4: Ethical Approval

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: Mary Robinson

SUPERVISOR: Rachel Smith

COURSE: Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

STUDENT: SHREHAN REHIM

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: Exploring Young People's Experiences on Social Media

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

Approved

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer):*

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER (for reviewer)

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐

HIGH

☐

MEDIUM

☒

LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Reviewer (Typed name to act as signature): Mary Robinson

Date: 3rd June, 2016

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (Typed name to act as signature): Shrehan Rehim

Student number: u1438325

Date: 5th June 2016

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here:

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

Appendix 5: Debrief Information with details of support organisations



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Thank you for taking part!

Remember...

If you have any questions about the study following the interview please contact me at u1438325@uel.ac.uk

Your interview will be typed up into a transcript and all identifiable information will be anonymised. The audio file and transcripts will be saved on a password protected computer. The data from your interview will be used in the research write up.

You have the right to pull out if you no longer wish to take part in the study, but please ensure that you inform me within 2 weeks of your interview by emailing me at u1438325@uel.ac.uk

We understand that young people can have very difficult and negative experiences online. It can be helpful to talk to professionals and other supportive people such as friends, parents or caregivers about these experiences. Below is a list of services that can offer you further support and information.

ChildLine

Website: www.childline.org.uk

Tel: 0800 1111 (free calls)

Ditch The Label

Website: www.ditchthelabel.org/get-help/

Tel: (01273) 201129

Bullying UK

Website: www.bullying.co.uk

Tel: 0808 800 2222

Appendix 6: Research Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology

Stratford Campus

Water Lane

London E15 4LZ

The Principal Researcher

NAME: Sherry Rehim

Contact Details: u1438325@uel.ac.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to help you decide whether to participate in this research study. The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

Project Title: Exploring Young People's Experiences on Social Networking Sites

What Is The Research Project About?

The aim of the research is to understand young people's experiences on Social Networking Sites. The research will particularly focus on understanding the negative experiences young people have had, what sort of effect it had on them and what helped or made it harder for them to deal with these experiences. The finished research will be in the form of an academic thesis. Once completed, I might turn this research into an article that is submitted for publication in an academic journal. This will hopefully help improve professionals' and academics' understanding of young people's experiences on Social Networking Sites and what can be done to support them with the challenges they may face.

The research involves me carrying out a one to one interview with the young person. The interview will last up to 1 hour. We will talk about the young person's experiences and the questions I ask will depend on what each person wants to talk about. Generally you might be asked to talk about how you use Social Networking Sites, your experiences on them and how these experiences have affected you. We may talk about what has helped you through more difficult experiences you may have had when using Social Networking Sites or what made them harder to manage.

This may be a sensitive topic to talk about and it is possible that you might find it upsetting. It is important to know that you can take a break at any time in the interview or decide to reschedule it for

another time. I will also provide each young person with the contact details of organisations that can offer support and/or further information. You will also be able to withdraw from the research at a later date.

Confidentiality - Is It Private?

I will record the interview on a digital recorder so I can remember what we talked about. Only I will listen to the recording and I will type it up. The typed up version is called a transcript. Names, including yours and any identifiable information (e.g. the name of your school/college or the area you live in) will be changed in the transcript.

The transcript may be read by my supervisor at the University of East London and the examiners who test me when I complete my research project. No one else will be able to read the transcript. To make sure no one else has access to this information, the audio file and transcript will be saved on a password protected computer.

The examination of this research project will most likely take place in JULY 2017 and after the examination I will delete the audio recordings. The written anonymised transcript will be kept in an electronic form for three years. This is because it will be needed if I turn the research into an article for publication in a journal. The final write-up of the research will include quotes from the interviews. This write-up maybe shared with the college you attend should they wish to read the final project. But please remember all identifiable information will be changed or taken out and every effort will be made to ensure that your identity will not be known or recognised by any reader.

It's important that you know that there is one situation when I would need to tell someone else about what we had talked about. If you tell me something that made me think you or someone else was at risk of harm, then I would need to tell my research supervisor and XXX (Sixth-Form Lead) to ensure your safety. Where possible I would try to let you know that I have done this.

Location

Interviews will take place in a quiet and suitable room at your college but if this is not possible or you would prefer not to be interviewed there, I will arrange for the interview to happen at the University of East London.

Disclaimer – Important Things to Remember!

You don't have to take part in this study and should not feel forced to take part. If you consent to taking part but then change your mind that is fine. You can pull out of the study even after you have finished the interview and you do not need to give a reason.

If you no longer want your interview to be a part of the study you must let me know within 2 weeks of the interview. Please email at u1438325@uel.ac.uk to let me know that you no longer wish to take part. If you let me know after this date I may have already completed the analysis of the interview and your anonymised information would already be included in this study.

Also, in this research, the answers given in one interview may change the questions I ask the next person. If you pull out of the study after your interview but before the 2 week deadline I might still use a theme that was raised by you in your interview. This would be done in a very general and anonymous way and would in no way be identifiable as something you said.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. You can email me at u1438325@uel.ac.uk. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to your interview. Please retain this invitation letter for your information.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the research supervisor Dr Rachel Smith, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Tel: 020 8223 4174. Email: r.a.smith@uel.ac.uk)

OR

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mary Spiller, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Tel: 020 8223 4004. Email: m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Sherry Rehim

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

University of East London

Appendix 7: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

Exploring Young People's Experiences on Social Networking Sites

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep.

☐

The nature and purpose of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information.

☐

I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

☐

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to identifying data.

☐

It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

☐

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to pull out from the study 14 days after the interview and without being obliged to give any reason.

☐

I understand that if I don't pull out 14 days after the interview (date: _____), the researcher has the right to use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

☐

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Participant's Signature



Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Researcher's Signature.....

Date:

Appendix 8: Research Project Poster

The poster below was displayed around the recruitment sites to advertise the research.



UEL Research Project: Exploring Young People's Experiences on Social Networking Sites

Are you 16-18 years old?

Do you use Social Networking Sites?

**Have you ever had a negative experience
online?**


I want to hear about your experiences online.

**I would like to invite young people to take part in an
interview about their experiences on social networking
sites.**

**The interview will be one to one and will take place in a
confidential place.**

**If you are interested in taking part or have any questions
please contact me:**

Sherry Rehim at u1438325@uel.ac.uk.



Appendix 9: Email sent to students

The following email was circulated to all students at each recruitment site. The information sheet was attached to the email.

Dear students,

Are you 16-18 years old and do you use social networking sites?

If so, I would like to hear about your experiences online.

I'm a researcher from the University of East London and I am carrying out a project to explore young people's experiences on social networking sites.

The research would involve taking part in a one to one interview with me to talk about your experiences online. The interview would take place in a confidential place.

I have attached an information sheet about the research.

If you would be interested in taking part or have any questions please contact me:
Sherry Rehim at u1438325@uel.ac.uk.

Best wishes,
Sherry Rehim

Trainee Clinical Psychologist
University of East London

Appendix 10: Interview Schedule & Amended Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following questions provide a guide to the areas to be covered in the semi structured interview, the questions and the order that they will be asked will be influenced by the participant's responses.

Introductions and engagement

Thank participant for taking part, re-iterate consent, confidentiality and that the participant may withdraw at any time today and thereafter before [DATE]. Agree approximate length of interview and that we can stop for a break at any point.

Interview Schedule - areas of discussion

1. How important is social networking sites (SNS) to you?
2. Which SNS do you use?
3. How often do you use it? When? And why?
4. Do you think your experiences on SNS are always positive?
5. Could you tell me about any negative experience on SNS? Prompting questions: What, When, Who was involved? What did you do?
6. What was it about this experience that made it "negative"?
7. How do you think this experience affected you? How did it make you feel? Did this change over time?
8. What do you think it was about this experience that lead to this effect?
9. What made the effects of this experience worse? Better?
10. Could you tell be about what helped you to get through this experience?
11. Was there anything that made it more difficult to get through this experience?
12. How, if at all, have you changed since your experience?
13. Have there been other similar experiences? Did you feel more able or less able to deal with these experiences now? And why?
14. Could you tell what, if anything, that you would have done differently?
15. What do you think makes people resilient to negative experiences on SNS?
16. If you were talking to someone else who was going through the same experience what advice would you give them?

Debriefing: How do you feel about the conversation we've just had? Do you have any questions? You can contact me if you have any questions and here are some contact details for support organisations if you feel you'd like to talk to someone later on.

Prompts: Tell me more about that. What do you mean? What was that like for you? How does that make you feel? What do you think about that? Why do you think you say that? Can you give me an example?

Additional Questions

- When did you realise that it was a negative experience?
- Did you know the perpetrator? How well did you know them? What was your relationship like? How did it affect you knowing or not knowing the perpetrator?
- Do you think you would have felt differently if you had known/not known them?
- How has this experience affected your relationship?

- Some young people have said that they think cyberbullying is inevitable, that is part of life? What are your thoughts about that?
- Some young people have talked about brushing it off or ignore it regarding cyberbullying experiences, what are your thoughts about this?

Enquiring more about development/growth questions

- How, if at all, have you changed since your experience?
- How would you describe yourself before the experience?
- If this were to happen again, how do you think you would manage it now?
- What have you learned from your experience?

Appendix 11: Initial coding and Focused coding Example

Focused codes	Initial codes	Transcript
2. CONNECTING	2. Connecting with friends Family abroad Staying connected Using Facebook to stay connected	29 Any other reasons? 30 P2: Um, no. I think that's just it, to connect with my friends. And 31 also, I've got family in America so I can't call them all the time so 32 I need to be able to be connected to them somehow. So that's 33 usually through Facebook. Yeah.
Avoiding isolation	Seeing what's going on Staying connected Being isolated without Keeping informed Publicising [showing] yourself/your life	34 I: Any other reasons that you use social networking sites? 35 P2: Um, no, I don't think so. 36 I: Okay. How important are social networking sites to you? 37 P2: To me, I think they're quite important because without them, 38 I don't think you'd be able to see what's going on with your friends 39 or you wouldn't be able to connect as well so you-- I feel like 40 you'd be quite isolated without them. So, I feel like I really-- I don't 41 really need them but I think they're really helpful in terms of 42 knowing what's going on with other people, and showing people 43 what you were doing also.
Changing norms Publicising oneself Social comparing	Making comparison between generations -- Showing/Publicising yourself/your life Boasting to impress Making others jealous The norm Keeping up Losing out Good and bad aspects Using it in bad ways **Exposing/insulting others indirectly Starting arguments Indirect Creating conflict	44 I: Mm hmm. So, it's important it's helpful to share with people 45 what you are doing. Could you tell me more about that? 46 P2: Um, I think, it's just-- I don't know if it's our generation but we 47 have to show people what we're doing all the time, showing what 48 we're doing is the best. So, it's just a way of showing people, 49 "Hey, I'm doing this today and it's amazing," so everyone can 50 see, "Oh, look [name omitted] is doing this today." And thinks it's 51 cool. So, yeah. Everyone is doing it, it just the way it is, I feel like 52 you have to keep up nowadays. You lose out if you are not. 53 I: And what do you think about that?
Judging Intent (revengeful acts)	Showing what you are doing Making other jealous Purposely/intentionally writing nasty things All the time Girls sending nudes to boys Boys being jealous Boys sending nudes	54 P2: Um, I think it can be a good thing, but also a bad thing 55 because some people would use it in a bad way. There users 56 like, call out other people, if that make sense. So, if somebody's 57 doing something, someone else might put up a status indirect 58 and then saying, "Oh, this-- this kind-- So, that in sport, this sport 59 is really bad-- Ta, da, da, da." So that, you kind of-- it starts 60 arguments to be honest. I feel like a lot of arguments are started 61 over social media. 62 I: Hmm, hmm. Could you tell me a bit more about that? 63 P2: Um, I feel like lots of people-- because you're showing what 64 you're doing all the time, other people will become jealous of 65 what you're doing. So people purposely try and write-- like 66 people write nasty things about other people all the time. And uh, 67 I've heard a few girls that sent nudes to the boys, and the boys

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Appendix 12: Memo Examples

Date: June 2016

Initial reflections on interview with Nisha:

I was struck by the way that Nisha spoke about what being on SNS means to her. She really conveyed a strong sense of it being an integral part of her life. She seemed to connect SNS to what sounded like her core value; connecting with others. But in many ways she spoke about it feeling like the only way to connect with others, as if she'd be completely disconnected if she was not on SNS. This was really clear when she spoke about losing her phone and not knowing what to do with herself. But I got the sense that there was really little choice; it was either be included on SNS or you will get left behind. That said, SNS clearly had several benefits. It had strong a currency so much so that she wasn't willing to give it no matter how tough and intense the situation got when the rumours were being sent around.

Despite her enthusiasm for SNS, she was very clearly about the things she did not like. What really stood out to me was the way she described the "mass social comparisons". I was interested in how she connected social comparisons and the competitive atmosphere to aggressive acts. She described people's readiness to be nasty to others to make themselves look good at someone else's expense or simply because they were jealous. Her perception of having to be tough to survive has really stuck in my head. She made it clear that people would not be so candid face to face but online they were more confident. This has made me wonder if you have to be tougher on SNS than offline. I think at the time I assumed what she meant, but perhaps I need to explore this further.

I think the fact that she seemed to perceive this behaviour as cowardly might have helped her "shrug it off". She definitely seemed to say that she thought it was their problem not hers. However, I was also interested in the fact that Nisha didn't just blame it on the individual she seemed to take a wider lens. It seemed important to her that I understood that the problem was rooted in the wider context, particularly the marketing industry. She spoke at length about the social pressures to look good and have materialistic wealth and the effects that advertisement had on foster a competitive environment.

In terms of how Nisha might have experienced me, she seemed quite comfortable and open. But at times I got the sense that she was acting "tough" in front of me just how she might be on SNS. I wonder whether this had anything to do with my role as CP - maybe it was important to preserve the toughness in the context of speaking to a professional about a difficult experience. After all as Nisha emphasised - "it is all about self-image". This definitely draws my attention to the power difference in my relationship with these young people. I wondering whether it would be helpful to ask about what it's like to speak to a CP about their experience.

Memo Examples

Date: January 2017

Notes on “brushing it off”

Now I can see that brushing it off is a common idea. All the participants talk about it but in different way; shrug it off, ignore it, let it slide, shaking it off, let it go. All the descriptions seemed to have an element of ignoring the act or ignoring the perpetrator. But there seems to be different ways of brushing it off and I am not sure if they should all be under one category. Some of the young people seem to talk about turning their attention elsewhere and as a result of engaging in something else they can brush it off. But others talk about it more like an act of thinking, a cognitive process; thinking why it shouldn't bother them and why they should just “let it go”. They seem to think about it and then come to the conclusion that they should brush it off. This kind of thinking seems to happen with others. Mary spoke in detail about sitting with her sister and really thinking about why it should not bother her, I like her 5 year question (i.e. will it matter in 5 years) to help put her experience into perspective. Whereas with Marlon he spoke about turning to rugby which helped him keep busy, take his mind off it and then slowly it bothered him less and less. I'm starting to think these are two different concepts, but I'll need to go back and check and maybe I need to clarify this in upcoming interviews.

Date: 23rd February 2017

Note: Being aware of the Narrative therapy ideas seeping through.

I can see the influence of narrative ideas coming through. I guess I'm really immersed in narrative therapy at work and so I am not surprised that I can see narrative ideas in this. But I felt like Femi summed it up pretty well - her comment was powerful – “rather than letting people define me, I define myself”. For me that really resembles narrative ideas about re-authoring. But it is important to remind myself that I am naturally inclined to be I'm drawn to these ideas. I am not sure why but it's making me think of Kintsugi; repairing broken pots with gold. I am wondering whether it has something to do with the idea of building yourself up after you've been knocked down or broken. That is definitely something that many of them have alluded to. I wonder if the 'defining' is part of building yourself up again – and just like Kintsugi you become more beautiful and stronger when scattered and then repaired.

Appendix 13: Reflexive Account of Researcher's Position

I will briefly outline my own personal context which strike me as most influential on my interaction with this research. I will also be transparent about pre-existing relationships with the subject matter.

I am an Egyptian- British female, born and raised in London. I am in my late twenties and in my final year of clinical psychology training. I identify as being from a working class background, but recognise I am now part of a middle-class profession and with this comes privileges and status.

During my early years of secondary school, I experienced what I understood as bullying in the form of social exclusion as a result of my ethnicity and class. For many years this experience shaped my identity. For example, I struggled with a sense of ethnic identity and sought to reduce incongruence by increasing my "British-ness" whilst denying my own culture.

I am currently a social networking site user but I do not consider myself a particularly active user. I have not been involved in any form of online abuse or cyberbullying. I acknowledge how different my adolescent experiences were to those of the young participants given the context of increasing SNS. I became interested in young people's use of social media when I became increasingly aware that many of the young people's difficulties in clinical practice can some connection with social media. I was struck by young people's ability to face the complex challenges social media pose. I also found social discourses that blame social media for young people distress compelling. This was common among parents that I met in clinical practice. It is not the validity of such discourses that interests me but rather its usefulness. I believe that this discourse holds the potential to obscure the benefits of social media and positions young people as merely passive and vulnerable participants. They also can divert our attention away from the social-political context and the ways in which technologies are being pushed upon on society. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that my training in clinical psychology has influenced what I am drawn to and notice.

Appendix 14: Transcription conventions used

The following is a list of transcription conventions that were used.

Transcription conventions used

Wor- A dash shows a word has been cut off or not finished.

(words) A guess at what might have been said if unclear.

(inaudible) Unclear talk.

(.) Just noticeable pause.

(laughter), (sobbing) Representation of something that cannot easily be written.

Conventions used in the quotes

The following conventions were used for quotes included in the main body of the this thesis.

Name: Each quote begins with the participant's pseudonym

(pg. 12) the transcript line number which the quote starts on is indicated at the end of the quote

.... Part of extract excluded.

[words] Information added to make the quote easier to understand; not the participant's words.

I: Indicates what the interviewer said

Appendix 15: Categories, Subcategories and Focuses codes

CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES	FOCUSED CODES
Levels Of Context (overlap between Levels of Context and other categories are included in grey boxes or highlighted in grey)	<i>Socio-Political Context</i>	Living in a materialistic culture Being influenced by Media Experiencing racism Have to “man up” (cultural context) Experiencing social pressures offline and online
	<i>School Context</i>	Finding school approach punitive Spreading to school Wanting to leave school Receiving little support from school
	<i>Family Context</i>	Feeling loved and cared by family Feeling supported Upbringing nurturing self-worth
	<i>Peers Context</i>	Experiencing Peer pressure to be ‘on’ always Fearing peer exclusion Having support
	<i>Individual Context</i>	Being young “Older and wiser” Being Muslim Having good communication skills Being Christian Connecting with religion Putting trust in religion
Cyber Context	<i>Online Culture</i>	Feeling vulnerable Constant comparing(Social comparisons) Pressurising Connecting in a disconnected society’ Connecting with others Feeling disconnected Staying informed Avoiding exclusion Accepting norms Perceiving cyberbullying as normative Cyber-act as inevitable Cyber-act as universal “everyone is at risk” “Caring less online” Thinking people are less empathic online
	<i>Cyber-contextual Factors</i>	Finding it difficult to tell emotions online online anonymity “everyone can see” wider breath of audience spreading quickly being targeted by multiple people losing control

		being able to access private information "everything is permanent online"
Cyber-Act Factors	"No Getting Away" "Being Exposed" Knowing the Perpetrator	
Being Targeted	<i>Judging Intentionality</i>	Judging intent Realising it was intentional Experiencing difficulties establishing intent Consulting friends about intentionality Judging intent based on impact On purpose
	<i>Considering repetition</i>	Understanding repetition as sign of intent Perceiving non-repetitive acts are harmful Being under contrast attack Constant
	<i>Seeing self as a Target</i>	Being targeted Seeing self as target not victim Associating victim with powerlessness Differentiating target and victim Rejecting term 'cyberbullying' Being able to defend self Knowing it was wrong Thinking action needed to be taken
Attack On Self-Concept & Social Status		Feeling "under attack" Fearing damage to reputation Your reputation is the biggest risk" Losing friends Losing social status Questioning self Attempting to minimise damage to self-concept Having self-critical thoughts
Making Sense Of The Experience	<i>Assessing Threat, Seriousness & Acceptability</i>	Appraising threat to self-image Appraising threat to reputation Being under threat Feeling scared Considering seriousness Reflecting on acceptable vs. unacceptable behaviour
	<i>Assessing Threat, Seriousness & Acceptability overlapping with School Context & Socio-</i>	Making comparisons Minimising seriousness compared to other people's experiences

	<i>political context</i>	Considering magnitude of suicide (relating to cyberbullying) Witnessing cyberbullying reports on News
	<i>Understanding External Factors</i>	Self-blaming Internalising responsibility Dwelling on own actions Being blamed by other(Overlap Peer & Family Context) Receiving help from other to understand causality Realising perpetrator's action wrong Attributing causality to discrimination Attributing causality to perpetrators actions Attributing causality to online context
	<i>"Being in Control"</i>	Feeling in control Losing control of the situation Needing to be in control Attempting to re-gaining control
Strategies For Managing	<i>Technical strategies (TS)</i>	Blocking Deleting Reporting Coming offline Having technical knowledge (overlap with individual context) Getting others to report it (overlap with Peer Context) Finding TS partially useful
	<i>Technical strategies interacting with Online Context (cyber-feature factors)</i>	Being unable to remove content permanently
	<i>Confronting</i>	Speaking online Speaking face to face Trying to sort it out Needing to explain self Wanting to find out why "Showing I'm not intimidated" "adding fuel to the fire" Launching own attack back Feeling able to respond
	<i>"Brushing it off"</i>	Discounting the perpetrator Attributing negative qualities to perpetrator Putting it into perspective Minimising its importance in one's life Thinking it's not worth getting upset Thinking it's "minor" "Shrugging it off" "Ignoring"

		"Dismissing"
	<i>"Brushing it off" overlapping with Peer Context</i>	Being told it's not true Laughing about it with friends
	<i>Accepting</i>	Processing emotions Letting it in Letting it out Expressing self
	<i>Confiding in others (vs. not confiding)</i>	Reaching out Feeling heard Being supported Avoiding over-reaction Being self-reliant
	<i>Confiding in others (vs. not confiding) overlapping with Online context – accepted norms</i>	Expected to deal with it
	<i>Confiding in others (vs. not confiding) overlapping with Peer & Family Context School Context</i>	Knowing support is there Having trust in others Telling an adult when necessary Needing adult to intervene Fearing judgment & blame Protecting self from judgment Anticipating support & understanding Fearing punishment Experiencing teachers as unsupportive
	<i>Confiding in others (vs. not confiding) overlapping with Socio-Political Context</i>	Fearing legal implications
	<i>Receiving Support</i>	Being defend Being supported without asking Feeling cared for
	<i>Receiving Support overlapping with Online Context</i>	Receiving support from bystanders Receiving messages online
	<i>Re-focusing</i>	Distracting self Shifting priorities Focusing on self-improvement Engaging in meaningful activities (Re)connecting with values
Allowing Time		Needing time Time as "healer" Taking your time
Beyond The Cyber-Act: (Re)Building Self-Concept & Protective Shielding	<i>Consolidating Learning</i>	Gaining valuable learning Growing Re-framing negatives to positives Learning through struggle Knowing warning signs/risks Reflecting on learning

	Defining Self	<i>Knowing self with time (interaction with Individual context – age)</i> <i>Developing self-awareness</i> <i>Resisting negative narratives</i> <i>Others reinforcing positive qualities (interactions with Peer & Family Context)</i> <i>Connecting with strengths</i> <i>Making meaning through religion (Interaction with Individual Context – religion)</i> <i>Not letting them define me</i> <i>Re-building self</i> <i>“Taking control” to define self</i>
	Protective Shielding	<i>“Having a shield”</i> <i>Feeling stronger</i> <i>“Having a filter”</i> <i>“Having thick skin”</i>

Appendix 16: Exploration of Initial Coding Session

I met with two other trainee clinical psychologist (Trainee A, Trainee B) and one academic tutor (AT) all familiar with Charmaz's version of grounded theory (e.g. Charmaz, 2011). Our meeting involved coding two pages each other's transcripts. We did initial coding and considered focused codes in the transcripts excerpt. These codes were then discussed and compared as a group. Below is the memo I wrote after this exercise. I have included the first page from the transcript excerpt that was coded and have divided it up into two sections. I considered the main similarities and differences between my own initial coding and that of the trainees and academic tutor. I also outline some of the main emerging themes discussed. By doing this I hoped to make my own biases and assumptions transparent. I also used this opportunity to code with others as a quality check.

MEMO: Comparing initial coding for P5 (Gloria's) interview PG. 11.

I have divided the excerpt in two sections. The transcript excerpt is presented with my own initial coding. The double slash [/] is used to indicate the parameters of the text that was coded either using line by line or section by section coding. I then describe the trainees and academic tutor's coding and the discussions we had whilst comparing. When comparing codes each person's initial codes will be presented then either 'Trainee A', 'Trainee B' or AT will follow in a bracket to indicate which person came up with that code.

Section 1 (Lines 285-299):

Focused coding (Identity development) Developing self-awareness	Initial coding Reflecting, knowing self Knowing self in different way now through time	285 P5: Umm it made me think like umm, that made me think about
		286 myself and get to know myself even more because, // because
		287 the way I know myself now it was not the same at that time when
		288 she was like four year, five years ago maybe // So it made me
Developing resilience: "A person who has a shield"	Developing a shield Shield as protector; hitting (deflecting) back	289 be a more, I guess more-- a person which has a shield // Umm
Defining myself	Time; getting to into head Processing them a bit (acknowledging) Knowing I'm not what they say doesn't define me; defining myself: "what defines me is what I let define me"	290 what I mean by shield, it means like all these bad comments they
	Questioning responsibility	291 come but they hit on my, shield and they then just go back //
	Interpreting the comment	292 They used to get to me or get into my head // And now I might
		293 even process a little bit // But I'm more just like, I know I'm not
		294 that, I'm not that--that what they say // Doesn't define me and
		295 what defines me is what I let define me // So if I - if I can't say
		296 oh yeah is this is my fault because I'm letting that get into me //
Reflecting on ability to manage	Saying something about self Time: Getting to point; not letting comments define me	297 because it is the way actually, it's the way I take that comment //
		298 I think that actually says something about me // So I think I've got
		299 to the point where I won't let comments like that define me //

Overall in this section the transcript was coded very similarly to my own initial codes. In the first few lines (L 285-288) the group had codes such as "getting to know self" (AT) and "knowing self better" (Trainee B), "learning about self" (Trainee A). My initial code "knowing self in different ways through time" was coded as "different self-knowledge" by Trainee B and "developing self-awareness" by Trainee A. I thought the latter code was more analytical in comparison to my initial codes. I noticed that I was staying very close to the young person's words when doing the initial coding as recommended by Charmaz's (2011). However, on reflection, doing this at times means I have some long-winded initial codes that often seemed to summarise what the young person said. Charmaz (2011) also recommends keeping initial codes concise and short.

For lines 288-291 codes were again very similar including “person with shield” (AT), “having a shield” (Trainee B), “developing a shield” (Trainee A). However, the others did not have a code similar to “shield as protector”. Instead, their coding for line 290-291 seemed to focus on the process being described by the young person such as “defending self” (AT), “resisting comments” (Trainee A), “deflecting” (Trainee B) which were similar to my code “hitting/deflecting back”. On reflection, I can see how I was being influenced by my ideas and assumptions around protective factors that had begun to emerge from earlier interviews and also, possibly, my research questions. Whilst the metaphor of a “shield” created a strong image of protecting oneself with armour, I can see how here describing the action rather than defining the “shield” was a more useful initial code.

For lines 292-293, everyone had similar codes such as “getting into head” (Trainee B) and “processing comments” (AT & trainee B) and “processing criticism” (Trainee A). For lines 294-295 “defining self” was the most common used code, however, Trainee B suggested the code “power to define self”. Trainee B explained that the word “power” encapsulated the control which the young person seemed to be conveying in not allowing others to define her and felt that this code could covered more text. I thought this was interesting and resonated with other emerging ideas around re-gaining or taking back control. However, I felt it was more analytical and therefore perhaps more appropriate as a focused code.

I was drawn to the young person’s words in line 296 and coded this as “questioning responsibility”. Similarly, Trainee B coded this line as “asking self who is at fault” and Trainee A used the code “interpreting comment” to cover more text. I shared with the group, the themes around self-blame and responsibility that has emerged in other interviews. Here, I recognised that I was most likely being influenced and primed by these emerging ideas in my coding. AT was stuck by the last few lines and coded a larger section of text (L 295-298). AT explained that for him the young person seemed to be saying if she is ‘letting it get into’ (L 296) her then perhaps she is letting herself down or doing something wrong. Therefore, ‘letting it get into’ her says something about her as a person. AT coded L 295-298 as “reflecting on ability to manage”. Trainee B agreed and coded this section as “self-efficacy of coping” suggesting that here the young person seemed to be judging herself for how she managed. Similarly, I felt that this young person was having meta-cognitions about how she was coping and what it meant about her. For me, I wondered whether the young person was implying if she is ‘letting it get in’ then she is weak and if she is able to deflect it then she is strong. This idea connected with codes from other interviews about a strong vs. vulnerable selves and ideas about rejecting the victim label. My interpretation seemed to resonate with AT’s and Trainee B’s ideas. We discussed that Trainee B and AT’s codes perhaps are taking more of an analytic jump and could be considered as useful focused codes. Trainee A said she stayed close to the words of the young person and coded smaller sections, similarly to what I had done. Trainee A had codes such as “the way one interprets the comments” and “saying something about me”. For Line 288-299 everyone had similar codes including “with time” and “not letting comments define me”.

Section 2: Lines 301-312

Time & development	With time; not letting it define me	301	P5: Uh huh I guess with time you don't let it define you, I guess
Processing comments	Processing	302	with time yeah//. Because at that point, <u>uhm</u> I didn't take in but I
		303	was just like, I really gave it a big thought.// And I'm just like mmh
Self-critical thinking	Having self-critical thoughts	304	mm I'm I really fat, I'm I eating a lot.// Actually it made me think,
		305	oh yah what did I eat today? I ate this that that what, and then
	Looking at self; believing comments	306	think I actually do eat a lot//. But then and then you look at your
Knowing self	With time; knowing self;	307	body it's like woo I'm getting fat maybe it's because I'm eating a
	Realising people only know small part of me	308	lot.// It's school something like that but with time, guess I begin
		309	to know myself and just seeing that these people they only know
		310	me they only know me in school, they only know a small part of
Multiple selves	People knowing partial me	311	me.// They don't know me like fully when I'm at home, when I go
		312	out.//

In this section initial codes were similar. AT was drawn to L303, he was interested in the idea of giving it a 'big thought', suggesting that this seemed to illustrate conscious processing. AT coded this as "conscious thinking", trainee A coded it as "thinking about criticism" and trainee B coded it as "interpreting comments". They all used these codes to cover more text. Trainee A and AT were also drawn to line 307, codes included "looking at body" (Trainee A) and "looking inwards" (AT). AT explained that this line connected with ideas later in the excerpt whereby the young person speaks about looking in the mirror. For lines 208-312 the group used codes such as "full me, part me" (AT), "partially known" (trainee A) and "partially seen" (trainee B). Here the main difference between codes is that I interpreted what the young person said as a process of "realising" that people only know a part of her. I wondered whether I was being influenced by my own views about adolescence development, that during this time you do a lot of realising and learning over time. The group agreed that this could be possible but was not something they initially thought of. However, trainee A agreed that there was a sense of things changing over time and that the concept of time was evidently important to these processes the young person was describing.

Thoughts/learning points from this exercise:

- The idea around what it might mean to the participants to "let it in" is an area worth exploring.
- To consider the ideas around power and control – is defining self a way of taking back the control that was lost? To think more about the significance of this in resisting against the impact or being resilient. I need to be careful not to make this assumption just yet and should check this out if following interviews mention similar ideas.
- It was helpful to learn and observe how others were taking more analytic leaps in their coding. Conversations about what may be an initial code and a focused code were useful. It has also made me feel more confident in my coding and I feel reassured that other can see similar ideas. That said, the discussions about differences have drawn my attention to interesting ideas. I may also need to consider keeping my initial codes more concise.